MIDSUMMER DREAM, MIDWINTER NIGHTMARE

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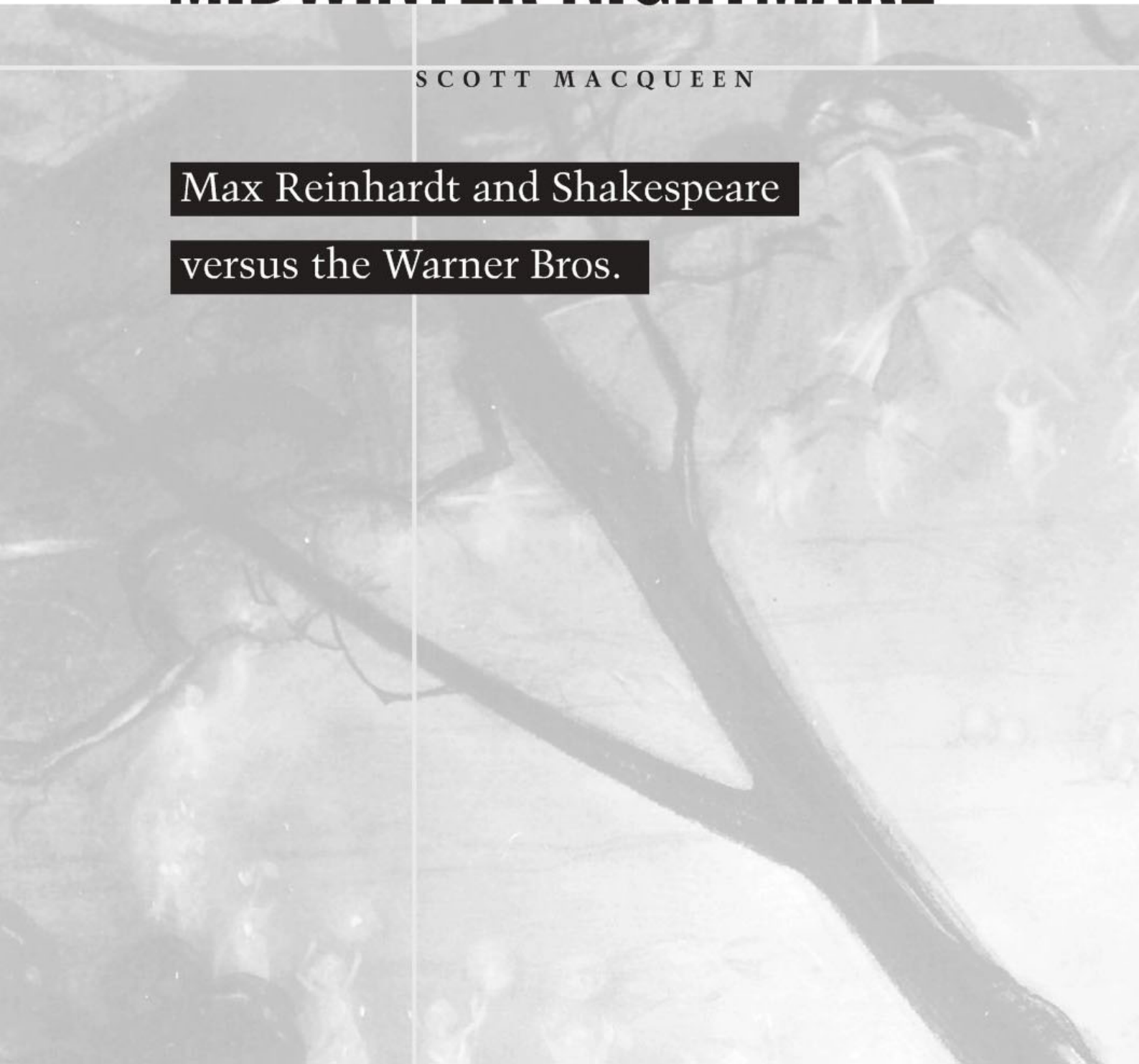
Max Reinhardt and Shakespeare versus the Warner Bros.



WHAT A DREAM WAS HERE

The Austrian producer Max Reinhardt was regarded as the greatest theatrical impresario of the age when, in 1934, he brought his latest staging of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to Los Angeles. For this, his thirteenth production of the play since 1905, Reinhardt transformed the Hollywood Bowl into a fairy realm and gave the movie colony "Shakespeare under the stars," enchanting fifteen thousand patrons nightly for eight nights. As the Bowl's enchantment overflowed to Burbank, home of Warner Bros. Pictures, a first-class motion picture was undertaken, and Shakespeare encountered obstacles of language and culture from which he may never recover.

Max Reinhardt's film adaptation streaked the eyes of 1930s movie audiences, lulling some with delights and filling others with hateful fantasies. Three-quarters of a century on, the modern viewer raises an eyebrow as high art collides headlong with high camp. The movie is a crazy jumble of rococo décor that mashes up pre-Christian Greece, sixteenth-century England, and nineteenth-century children's book illustrations with Beaux-Art architecture, Victorian etchings, and Jazz Age grace notes. There is a dash of Arthur Rackham here, a soupçon of Aubrey Beardsley there. A half-draped nude from

Aba Daba Honeymoon: The unlikely mating of Anita Louise and James Cagney. Almost as unlikely was the marriage of Max Reinhardt and Hollywood.

Maxfield Parrish nuzzles up to a fairy robe out of Erté. The Warner Bros. stock company declaims the poetry of England's greatest dramatist with the subtlety of a vaudeville patter song, compelled by their Teutonic task masters, ill met by arc light.

A Midsummer Night's Dream is absolutely bereft of taste, starved for respectability. Nevertheless, there are those who find every blessed, demented frame an utter delight. Looking beyond the movie's social and mercantile implications, American critic Andre Sennwald wrote in 1935,

> The special achievement is the ability to recite the complex fable with clarity. If this is no masterpiece, it is a brave and beautiful effort to subdue the most difficult of Shakespeare's works. It has its fun and its haunted beauty.[1]

The play's spectral fun originates in pagan traditions. In pre-Christian Europe, June 21, the summer solstice, was a festival day with mystic import. The calendar's longest day and shortest night was met with bonfires and ritual games for courting

Quarrelsome Foursome: Jean Muir, Ross Alexander, Dick Powell, Olivia de Havilland as the enchanted *ménage a quatre.*

Nature in the wrong: Elemental spirits Oberon (Victor Jory) and Titania (Anita Louise) wage a custody battle over Indian Prince (Sheila Brown).

lovers. It was believed that certain herbs picked that day accrued magical powers. This pagan worldview informs Shakespeare's comedy, which he is believed to have written in 1595.[2]

The play contrasts four sets of lovers whose adventures become entwined. Two of the couples are upper class mortals. Hermia and Lysander are true loves held apart by her father. Hermia's best friend, Helena, pines for Demetrius, but he loathes her and desires Hermia. Hermia despises Demetrius and favors Lysander. These couplings find counterpoint in two royal couples, one earthly and the other ethereal. Theseus and Hippolyta are worldly sovereigns whose union is political, brought about by subjugation, but which Theseus intends to turn to true love. In the fairy world, the elemental nature spirits Oberon and Titania are estranged over bragging rights to a changeling child.

Through magic and folly, mortal and fairy couples become confounded. A troupe of workmen unwittingly stumbles into the melee. Oberon has his agent, the spirit Puck, bewitch one of them into sporting the head of a donkey, and causes Titania to fall in love with the zoomorphic mortal as the mismatched lovers spend the night fatuously pursuing the wrong mates through the forest. As day breaks, Oberon lifts the enchantments and restores order.

Max Reinhardt made his reputation with his first production of this play in 1905. Born Maximillian Goldmann in 1873 in Baden, Austria, the son of a Jewish merchant,

Max Reinhardt rose to prominence in the early years of the twentieth century by fulfilling Richard Wagner's aesthetic of fusing all of the arts into one theatrical experience. From the intimacy of "*Kammerspiel*" to the broad gestures of expressionism, Reinhardt's influence on the art and business of world theater cannot be overestimated.

At his zenith, Reinhardt managed thirty theaters, including the largest in Berlin, founded the Salzburg Festival with Richard Strauss, and became the standard bearer for the cult of the director. His acolytes and protégés included Ernst Lubitsch, F. W. Murnau, Paul Leni, Paul Wegener, Otto Preminger, and Wilhelm Dieterle. They bestowed on him the honorific title "Herr Doktor Professor."

Reinhardt moved in a rarefied world of money and privilege. Critic Alexander Woollcott made a 1930 pilgrimage to Schloss Leopoldskron and described Reinhardt's decaying Salzburg palace as

> a vast, roseate pile . . . set in the foothills of the Tyrolean Alps . . . though most of its guest rooms (each only slightly smaller than the grand concourse of Pennsylvania Station) will not fill up until August, the work of refurbishing the place goes on year in, year out . . . You might come upon anyone in its murmurous corridors—a sprinkling of old princes and new bankers and then all the vagrants of the seven arts, from Anita Loos to Stanislavsky, from Guitry to Ruth Draper, from Arnold Bennett to Lillian Gish.[3]

On the occasion of the 1928 Salzburg Festival, Lincoln Eyre's dispatch sardonically mapped out the social pecking order:

> In the course of a season the professor gives two or three large receptions after opening performances and a half dozen small dinners. His guests at the dinners look down on those who are privileged to attend only the receptions and the latter scorn the wretched nobodies who are not invited to either.[4]

SHADOW ART

In 1926 Reinhardt journeyed from Leopoldskron to Hollywood, where he huddled with the United Artists: Joseph Schenck, Charlie Chaplin, Mary Pickford, and her husband Douglas Fairbanks. It was just a social call, he maintained. Reinhardt loathed the movie colony. His only kind words were for his United Artists hosts, D. W. Griffith and Charlie Chaplin, and Chaplin's once-upon-a-costar, aging child actor Jackie Coogan.

Max Reinhardt was no instinctive friend of film. In 1926, during the period now

regarded as the golden age of silent cinema, he wrote an essay called "On the Film," in which he railed against the movies' inadequacy. What purports to be an artist's manifesto is better understood as a mountebank's press release. How better for Reinhardt to position his advent to a bastard art than as its savior?

"There is no creative film literature," he declared, branding the moving picture "a dangerous parasite of the theater, of painting, of music. Music borrowed from operas, concerts, dancing melodies cannot save film from that unfortunate dumbness which is its fate . . . Wither is this ever-increasing staging of masses to lead, those buildings, dressed up circus animals, acrobats?" asked Reinhardt.[5]

To prove that he was a past master of the vile art of movie making, Max now admitted a youthful indiscretion: he had made *one* previous film in 1911. Reinhardt actually directed four movies between 1910 and 1914,[6] all of them proving, wrote a modern critic, that "for all his theatrical genius, he had no sense of film form, of framing, pace, or how to tell a story using a camera . . . they look as if anybody could have shot them, just set up the camera and run off a few takes."[7]

And thus had Max his part discharged so, and being done, thus Max away did go, to make a Hollywood movie starring Lillian Gish. Miss Gish passed the summer of 1928 at Leopoldskron in the company of Hugo von Hofmannstahl, librettist of *Der Rosenkavalier* and Reinhardt's cofounder of the Salzburg Festival, as he composed a film story for her. It was based on the contemporary event of a young Bavarian woman, Therese von Konnersreuth, who in 1926 was alleged to suffer the stigmata of the crucified Christ.[8] Reinhardt was simply corking old wine in new bottles: this was just a Reinhardt repertory staple, *The Miracle,* redux.

In the fall, Reinhardt announced that he would decamp "at once to Hollywood to direct my first movie, with Lillian Gish. The play will depict life in the Austrian Alps."[9] Professor Reinhardt now believed in movies, but they were to be Eurocentric and not talk. Arriving in New York by luxury liner on Christmas Eve, Reinhardt expressed to dockside reporters that movies were but a "shadow art" and made known his dislike of "talkies." When the newsmen told him how successful talking pictures were in America, he was astonished but not impressed. We will have music in Miss Gish's film, Reinhardt decreed, but no spoken words.[10]

Production was set to begin in Hollywood in January 1929, but things unraveled quickly. Joseph Schenck and United Artists wanted only a talking picture, in English. Before anyone could say, "Mit Out Sound," Reinhardt was back on the boat for Europe, another hapless victim of the studio system. "Man proposes," he sighed from Salzburg, "the studio supervisor disposes."

Reinhardt's former pupil, F. W. Murnau, offered his former mentor public advice

about picture making. Addressing Reinhardt directly in the pages of the *Washington Post,* the director of *Sunrise* stated:

> Stage and pictures must be definitely divorced from each other for the good of the latter. Stage production must no longer be made over into pictures. Stage business must be discarded before the camera . . . sets must be built by men who learn their craft in the studios and not behind theater curtains . . . pictures are now in their maturity and film producing is an art old enough to have its own traditions.[11]

When Max next came to Hollywood, he either had forgotten or chose to ignore Murnau's advice.

SHAKESPEARE UNDER THE STARS

In May 1933, in westward flight from the Nazis, Reinhardt stopped near Florence, Italy, and staged *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by moonlight in Boboli Woods, and again at South Park, Headington near Oxford, England, on June 15. Arriving in America, he came to Hollywood not as a film director but as the Herr Doktor Professor Reinhardt staging a great play.

Reinhardt persuaded the California Festival Association (an arm of the state Chamber of Commerce) to buy into his dream. The staging at the Hollywood Bowl in September 1934 would be a signal oasis in the history of the cultural desert of Los Angeles. It had come about due to the needling of Catherine Sibley, daughter of Professor Robert Sibley, a bigwig at the University of California. According to Reinhardt's son Gottfried, stage-struck Catherine had pursued his father "all over Europe . . . making a perfect pest of herself."[12] Associating with Herr Doktor Professor motivated her to pester her father with the idea of the California Festival Association and to engage Reinhardt.

Reinhardt removed the famous shell from the Bowl and built an artificial hill, planted with real grass. Live oak trees were trucked in from Calabasas. As the audience faced the stage, a high platform on the left held aloft the Los Angeles Symphony Orchestra, its players heard but not seen behind a screen of bushes and branches, sawing away at Mendelssohn. At the crest of the artificial hill, stretching toward Highland Avenue, was a footbridge, reached by a winding path through the tundra and wired with tiny electric lights to simulate fireflies. Unemployment spawned by the Great Depression meant that the Civil Conservation Corps easily supplied several hundred young men (the number

Make Mine Mickey: Forget Chaplin, Astaire, and Pickford. Rooney as Puck was seen by 150,000 citizens of Hollywood, October 1934.

varies by account) outfitted in Greek togas. Each out-of-work torchbearer earned one dollar a night to wend his way to Theseus's palace. At the dress rehearsal, the CCC supers became lost in the dark foothills and didn't arrive at the palace until two hours after the play ended.

The cast was dotted with Hollywood supporting players John Lodge, Walter Connolly, Evelyn Venable, and Sterling Holloway. Reinhardt could not understand why his desire to get a top star like Charlie Chaplin, Fred Astaire, or Eddie Cantor to play the boyish earth-spirit Puck could not be gratified.[13] Reinhardt's announcement that a young boy would play Puck miffed the forty-two-year-old Mary Pickford, essentially retired but apparently no wiser for her disastrous 1929 outing in the first Shakespearean talkie, *The Taming of the Shrew*. What was Puck, after all, but an earlier incarnation of Peter Pan? Both pixies were traditionally portrayed on stage by women. Mary thought she'd make a fine Puck; after all, hadn't Maude Adams played *Peter Pan* on stage until she was forty-six?

WELCOME WANDERER

In his autobiography, Mickey Rooney recalled how he was cast in the Bowl production. His mother took the thirteen-year-old boy on a cattle call where Reinhardt's majordomo, Felix Weissberger, conducted the eliminations and liked the boy's cold reading. "Now I vant you should go home und memorize all this und come beck tomorrow for anozzer audition. *Verstehen sie?*" Rooney's mother urged him to memorize his lines that night. On the callback, barely understanding what the words meant, the boy improvised the annoying laugh, "part bray, part boy," as he termed it, that he made his performance's

hallmark. "*Das Lachen*"—"That laugh," beamed Reinhardt, and Rooney was in.[14]

Just as the role would launch Rooney to major stardom, the career of Olivia de Havilland began with the merry wanderer of the night. In her hometown of Saratoga, California, she was Puck in a school production of the play. Saratoga was a suburban enclave of San Francisco populated, then as now, by wealthy artistes and intellectuals. Olivia's school play was in part mounted by Dorothea Johnston, one of Saratoga's artistic gentry. Learning of the imminent Reinhardt production in Los Angeles, Olivia set her hopes on watching the rehearsals. As it happened, Dorothea knew Catherine Sibley and made the introduction. With such patronage the eighteen-year-old Olivia had no impediment to gaining entrée to Felix Weissberger. A position was created: second understudy to Jean Rouverol, who was understudy to the film star Gloria Stuart in the role of Hermia. In this way the Sibleys were gratified, Miss de Havilland attained her observer role, and there was no harm, no foul.[15]

When Rouverol withdrew from the cast to play W. C. Fields's daughter in *It's a Gift,* Olivia was made first understudy. Five days before opening night, Gloria Stuart's agent, Jesse Wadsworth, dropped the bombshell that Stuart was abandoning Shakespeare for a film commitment. Reinhardt turned to the teenager as if they were Ruby Keeler and Warner Baxter in *42nd Street* and announced, "You vill play zee part."[16] Real estate czar and *Los Angeles Times* publisher Harry Chandler coerced the studio moguls to underwrite a $125,000 guarantee for the venture, but it never had to be called on. The play opened September 17, 1934. The first night was standing room only. The five-night run was extended to seven to accommodate demand. An "Absolutely Final" encore played the night of September 24. With 150,000 spectators, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* broke all box office records in the Hollywood Bowl's ten-year history.

Was it good theater? Perhaps not, according to Reinhardt's future collaborator William Dieterle.

> [The Hollywood Bowl] version of the play cannot be compared with his earlier Shakespearean adaptations. It was a better "show" perhaps, but Shakespeare died somewhere along the way. With 20,000 seats, [the Bowl is] not a theatre, not even a hall, it's a "place." It was a "show" and not a play, and Reinhardt knew it.[17]

A northern California tour followed. There were two weeks at the University of California at Berkeley, again an outdoor venue where the audience processed with the cast from the fairy bower at the Faculty Glade to Theseus's palace at the Greek Theater. Four weeks followed, indoors, at the San Francisco Opera House. Even if Reinhardt

Throne Room for a King: William Dieterle tried to instruct Reinhardt in film craft, but even here Reinhardt has ordered Anton Grot to design a proper theatrical stage maquette of Theseus's throne room.

had hopes of reaching New York, the show ran out of steam after four more weeks at the Blackstone Theater in Chicago.

BURBANK, WHERE A WILD TIME GROWS

Among those who had been enchanted at the Hollywood Bowl was Hal Wallis, Warner Bros. production chief. Wallis claimed that he broached the idea of filming the play to his boss, Jack Warner: "I think Jack Warner felt as though a brick had fallen on his head when I announced my intention," Wallis said.[18]

When Wallis made this seminal claim in his 1980 memoirs, he didn't fear being contradicted by William Dieterle, who by then had been dead eight years. Dieterle was a staff director at Warner Bros. and likely the true progenitor of the film. In 1920s Berlin, Wilhelm Dieterle had been a robust young actor, a member of Reinhardt's company for nine years—but what he really wanted to do was direct, which he did starting in 1923. He was one of four German artists Warner Bros. brought from Berlin in the summer of 1930 to appear in German-language talkies filmed in Hollywood.[19]

His initial contract was as actor, writer, and director for two photoplays in American and German versions (both or either) at $1,000 a week with an eight-week minimum. When the pan-talkie experiment collapsed in 1931, Dieterle was signed to a fifty-two-week contract to direct Hollywood product, beginning with the highly regarded *The Last Flight,* his name anglicized to "William." By the time of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* he was earning $1,500 a week.

Six months before his death in 1972, Dieterle was interviewed by Tom Flinn. "I suggested [Reinhardt] make a film of the [Hollywood Bowl] production," he said.

> I said [to Warner Bros.], "Let's do it because here we have something that will raise Warner Bros. from a second-rate studio right into the ranks of the aristocrats." . . . Though [Reinhardt] was treated like a visiting celebrity, he never forgot he was a refugee. He was very conscious that he could never go back [to Germany] . . . I wanted to give him something to think of, because Reinhardt, if he wasn't planning something new, was a lost man. He answered, "Why not?"[20]

Interesting, a contemporary story in *The Los Angeles Times* credits neither Wallis or Dieterle but Dieterle's wife, Charlotte Hagenbruch, as the facilitator who made the *Dream* come true:

> It was born of her enterprise and persuasion. No, Max Reinhardt would not make a picture. Anyway he did not want to risk Shakespeare. Moreover, if he did he wouldn't ever get up before noon . . . Also he didn't understand cameras and picture technique, and he didn't speak English very well and . . . So it was Charlotte Dieterle who suggested that it was her William, who had once been the John Barrymore of Germany, who knew pictures from bow to stern, who was expert in cameras, who was a genius at fantasy . . . and above all, who could make Reinhardt get up at 7 a.m. It was Mrs. Dieterle who tackled Hal Wallis, sold him wholesale, made and signed all the business contracts; bore with Max and William while they swatted over the adaptation and culled the Mendelssohn score; fed them pineapple pancakes and put just the right record in the gramophone to soothe temperamental breasts at taut moments.[21]

Why did Warner Bros. elect to make such a costly and offbeat movie? The studio hadn't survived the onset of the Great Depression with high culture or profligate spending. They had been a small Hollywood studio with one top director (Ernst Lubitsch) and one top star (John Barrymore). Their gamble on the Vitaphone sound system catapulted Warner Bros. to the forefront in 1927, and, flush with money for a time, they swallowed up First National Pictures in Burbank, gaining expanded studio facilities. By the early 1930s, under Darryl F. Zanuck, their output was a slate of "ash can" product, tightly budgeted, mercilessly time-managed gangster films, musicals, and crackling melodramas, gauged for maximum appeal to a working-class audience. As the London correspondent for *The New York Times* would later report:

> From its inception there were many items that marked the *Dream* a departure from run of the mill product of Hollywood. In the first place the Warner lads were a little weary of being known solely as the manufacturers of shooting gallery drama. From their side of town they looked across the railroad tracks and wished that they, too, could be swanky.[22]

In 1934, again financially stable following the economic downturn of 1933, Warners was a blue-collar movie studio toying with cultural ambitions. Typical of their 1934 product line is William Dieterle's *Fog over Frisco,* a crime and murder spree involving San Francisco society, gangsters, and newspaper reporters. Costing a mere $146,000 to make, paced like an express train for its tight 68 minutes, *Fog over Frisco* sums up all that was fundamental and successful in the Warner Bros. production system of 1934. Adding Shakespearean caviar to a release schedule that normally handled beer-and-pretzels like *Fog over Frisco, Gold Diggers of 1935,* and *The Case of the Curious Bride* was a risky gambit and a bit mad. It was only possible because, in addition to being a *succès d'estime,* the Hollywood Bowl production had also been a sell-out with audiences and made money.

Yet, in adapting Shakespeare, Warners was courting catastrophe. Years after the fact, Hollywood was still snickering over the first talking Shakespearean film, the Pickford–Fairbanks miscarriage of 1929 known as *The Taming of the Shrew.*

Jack Warner was nothing if not decisive. Within the month of the final performance at the Bowl, Reinhardt was signed to the studio. His contract for *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was executed on October 23, 1934, and garnered him the princely sum of $75,000 plus $25,000 for a personal assistant, specified to be Helene Thimig.[23] Thimig was Reinhardt's mistress and the future conditional Frau Reinhardt, once Max's divorce from his wife Elsie Heims was final. The contract specified William Dieterle as Reinhardt's directorial "assistant." Recalled Dieterle,

> They worried about Reinhardt's English, so I told them I would help with the technical side of the production and the language problem, but I would let Reinhardt direct the play since it was very much his show.[24]

Should Dieterle not be available, the studio would supply five alternates for Reinhardt to select from. If Reinhardt did not like any of them, the studio would assign someone. Reinhardt was given the "privilege" of being present at "cutting, titling, and

editing" where he was permitted to "offer or make suggestions." Final cutting was to be "mutually agreed upon" by Reinhardt and the studio, but Reinhardt's consent was "not to be unreasonably withheld."[25]

As the prospect of working in Hollywood became a reality for Reinhardt, his son Gottfried, already working in the studio system, cautioned him:

> If you don't succeed in films, it will be your own fault . . . because you might not attack this new medium with the pleasure, energy, and grasp it deserves . . . And I tell you this: Papa, don't make any compromises, they make no sense . . . Be hard. Only that way will you get anywhere with the hard people here and with the soft delegates who represent the big shots . . . For art—there is no other way—has to be forced on the people running Hollywood.[26]

BARBAROUS, UNETHICAL, AND LOUSY

In 1934 Hollywood, where did one find writers conversant with iambic pentameter and sixteenth-century poetry? Wallis's immediate response was to make the dialogue "colloquial," suggesting a brace of Pulitzer Prize–winning American playwrights, Thornton Wilder and Paul Green.[27] Both had screenplay experience and Green was known at Warners, where he had written *Cabin in the Cotton* (1932). Next he cast his glance to merry old England in search of a youthful but respected English writer who could housebreak the Bard for Hollywood. He cabled Irving Asher, managing director of Warners' London operation:

> Can you suggest ideal man among younger authors or poets you (sic) could undertake task rendering more colloquial some of the text of Shakespeares Midsummer Night Dream STOP Don't mean to modernize it in any way but here and there to clarify the more esoteric passages with all reference to original STOP would prefer someone not connected with theatre neither too modern or too conservative it's essential that beauty of verse be preserved and understood by picture audiences STOP[28]

The ability to work amicably with director Dieterle ultimately weighed heavier than literary credentials, and two studio writers got the assignment. Charles Kenyon had written Dieterle's previous film, *The Firebird*. He was a studio veteran in his fifties who had toiled on westerns and Lon Chaney pictures since the 'teens. Mary McCall Jr. was a

leftist writer in her thirties, hired by Warner Bros. to adapt her novel *Revolt* as *Scarlet Dawn* for Dieterle. She was an intellectual who would be very involved in Writers Guild politics and would subsequently write the Paul Muni film *Dr. Socrates* for Dieterle. As a team, they seemed to balance the not-too-conservative / not-too-modern mandate.

The writers' very first step was clubfooted. Their worst impulses appeared on the first page of the shooting script where they desperately visualized a marzipan nightmare of a title sequence. Cupid would shoot his little arrow, tree branches would sway to usher in the Main Title. Cupid would weave a ribbon decoratively through the branches and toss it into the air to form a frame for the original Shakespeare folio, emblazoned with "the authentic signature of *WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE.*[29] Hal Wallis wasn't buying any of it. On January 21 he considered asking Leon Schlesinger to submit sketches for a "smart looking title."[30]

Where was the advantage in Kenyon and McCall reducing Shakespeare's text by half if their script became swollen with meaningless physical action? For example, their version of Puck attaining the magic flower would have required the resources of a two-reel short. The screenplay had him orbiting on a tree branch across a starry sky, his shadow cast by moonlight over snow-capped mountains. In close shots, he would pull a pinecone off a branch, eat the pine nuts, and discard the cone. In an underwater shot, the pinecone would hit the surface as an exotic fish swam by to eat it. Arriving at a distant wilderness (to be filmed on location in the Santa Cruz redwood forests), Puck would slide down the trunk of a giant redwood as a black panther emerged from the forest and sniffed him. As Puck plucked the magic flower it would open in slow motion to reveal its purple majesty (a Technicolor or hand-colored insert in the otherwise black-and-white movie).

Such extraneous action only cluttered the narrative and inflated the budget. In Shakespeare, Theseus announces to his conquered Amazon bride, "Hippolyta, I wooed you with my sword." McCall and Kenyon illustrated this succinct statement with enough action for a full ten-minute reel. An eight-page prologue depicted galleons at sea, the burning of Hippolyta's castle fortress, Amazon women battling Athenian men, a choreographed fight between Hippolyta and Theseus, and aerial shots of Athens. At an estimated cost of $9,300 for sets, matte paintings, and process shots alone, it did nothing to advance the telling of the story and was scuttled on November 20. That same day a forty-day shooting schedule was submitted with a tentative budget of $459,000 (not including the cast). Both schedule and budget would prove as expendable as the prologue.

McCall fully expected subsequent hands to prune the adaptation (and, indeed,

director Dieterle would later state that he wrote final adaptation[31]), but her concerns were for language, not action:

> I have taken liberties with Mr. Shakespeare's text which make me break out in cold perspiration . . . a lot of this is written not in blank verse, but in rhyming couplets—and it would be barbarous, unethical and lousy to divorce a rhyming couplet from its mate. The whole couplet must be preserved, or stricken out—but don't leave the rhymes hanging in mid-air, or our audience will go cuckoo waiting for the other shoe to drop.[32]

In November, even as she was lying-in at St. Vincent's Hospital after having given birth to twin boys, she continued to write production supervisor Henry Blanke on the back of hospital nursing logs, pleading against the corruption of Shakespeare's meter. "Don't let it through!" she begged.[33]

SYCOPHANTS, SINECURES, AND SOUBRETTES

At Warner Bros., Reinhardt insulated himself with "*Ja*-men" from the Old Country. Already installed at the studio was Henry Blanke (née "Heinz"), a German with six-degrees-of-separation from Reinhardt. Normally an efficient production supervisor,[34] "Heinz" Blanke would become so mesmerized by the great Herr Doktor Professor that he would completely abandon his responsibility to the studio. German was the sole medium of communication on the set, and effects cameraman Byron Haskin was stunned by the sight and sound of Dieterle and Reinhardt prattling like the Katzenjammer Kids while Blanke wandered behind them like a hypnotized stooge from Dr. Caligari's cabinet.[35]

Music was a key component of the Reinhardt aesthetic, and he knew the music and the music maker he wanted. Even though émigré composer Franz Waxman was already in Hollywood, and his agent, A. George Volck, had approached the studio offering his client's services, Reinhardt sent to Europe for Erich Wolfgang Korngold, who just nine months earlier had pulled together the musical resources for Reinhardt's disastrous Italian revival of Strauss's *Die Fledermaus* in February. Reinhardt had become besotted with Korngold on a happier *Fledermaus* in Berlin in 1929.

Korngold asked for $6,000 to provide the music, plus round-trip fare for himself and his wife and living expenses while in Hollywood. Wallis instructed Irving Asher in London to complete negotiations for a flat $8,000 for the entire job. The importance of getting him was stressed; Reinhardt would have no one else. Further options andcontracts

Ill met by moonlight: Puck observes the arrival of Titania and her attendants, as conceptualized by Anton Grot.

were dangled as enticements.[36] Korngold sailed for New York on October 23, 1934, and trained to Hollywood on October 31.

Reinhardt chose other key collaborators from Europe. For choreography he wanted the best that the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo had to offer, the disciples of Diaghilev and Nijinsky. Reinhardt asked for Léonide Massine ("impossible"), he called for George Balanchine ("forget Balanchine"), he settled for Nijinksy's sister. Bronislava Nijinska was signed on October 30.

His first choice for costume and set design was the celebrated and flamboyant British designer, Oliver Messel.[37] When Messel was unavailable, he turned to Max Rée for costumes. As an art director for Radio Pictures, Rée knew his way around movies, and, having dressed the Bowl production of the *Dream,* he knew his way around Reinhardt. For set design the studio assigned Anton Grot, the brilliant Polish artist-designer whose continental sensibility was responsible for the distinctive look of Warner films. Grot not only designed sets, he functioned as a production designer, sketching the mood and proposed look of the film.

Reinhardt ordered a literal forest. In addition to covering two soundstages, it opened onto an outdoor extension. A visiting reporter described the setting:

> The sound stage inside which [the fairy forest] is built is larger than an ordinary city block. This stage, however, is so big that it overflows from the stage into the outdoors, a huge trestle effect, covered with trees, boulders that appear to weigh a ton, and a water course . . . the trestle rises about sixty feet at its top

> and gives the impression of being a mountainside of great altitude. It is possible to shoot scenes on this landscaped slope from inside the stage, giving the general feeling from behind the camera that one is looking at all outdoors.[38]

Casting notes for the *Dream* are as intoxicating as they are eccentric. Glittering star names like Kay Francis, Buster Keaton, and Laurence Olivier are jotted helter skelter alongside character players like Lionel Atwill and Andy Devine. Dieterle wrote on his notes that Hermia was to be "A Young Pola Negri"—Josephine Hutchinson perhaps or, better yet, Bette Davis. The studio wanted a movie star Hermia, but Reinhardt insisted on Olivia de Havilland, his "discovery" from the Bowl. She almost got away due to an agent's misunderstanding that Bette Davis was already set.[39] Portending de Havilland's future contract battles with the studio, the teenager returned to the studio the signed contract for *A Midsummer Night's Dream* but noted,

> I am not returning the long-term contract since you have unfortunately sent me an agreement for a seven year period, when my Hollywood arrangement with you provided for a five year term.[40]

Along with contract player Guy Kibbee as Bottom, Mickey Rooney was the only actor whose name appeared on the earliest cross-plot. For Rooney to reprise Puck meant borrowing him from MGM at $150 per week, with a four-week guarantee and a three-week bonus. MGM made more on the deal than Rooney. They were directly paid an additional $600 a week for Rooney's services, plus a premium of $450.[41]

Rooney was a long-in-the-tooth kid actor on the dreaded cusp of adolescence. Since 1926, he had already appeared in nearly one hundred films and now, at an age when most child actors are washed up, this performance was the fifteen-year-old's gateway to major stardom. Having lived the role night after night on stage, the meaning of the lines that had eluded him at the audition was now second nature. His energy and brash conviction, and his absolute glee in the role, are overwhelming. He brought to Puck an enthusiasm and sense of play that only the young at heart are capable of, and largely dazzled his critics. One snooty holdout was *The Chicago Daily Tribune,* who called Rooney "just a junior Tarzan, and, for the most part, a noisy little nuisance."[42]

To this day there is no middle ground. Audiences either adore or abhor his performance. Rooney has always been his own harshest critic and expressed dissatisfaction with his performance as Puck, but this role established him as a major personality in films, and he would return to MGM a star.

Mickey Rooney as Puck: "Remarkable Performance!—*New York Times.*" "Just a junior Tarzan, a noisy little nuisance."—*Chicago Daily Tribune*

Two other performers made the transition from the Bowl production. Nini Theilade, a young dance protégée of Anna Pavlova, was born in Java of Danish parentage. She was spotlighted as a Principal Fairy and featured prominently in a *pas de deux* in the "Nocturne." She would go on to her own formidable career as a choreographer. Robin Starveling, the Tailor ("The Moon," in the play-within-the-play), was reprised by Otis Harlan, stepping in during production on January 4 to replace Warner contract player Harry Holman (Harlan had been first choice, and it is possible that he became available unexpectedly).

Buster Keaton and Andy Devine were contenders on Dieterle's wish list to play Flute, the gender-challenged bellows-mender who must reluctantly act the maiden "Thisbee" in the play-within-the-play—but why go out of house when Joe E. Brown was Warner Bros.' biggest comedian and one of America's top-ten box-office attractions? Brown's agent, Ivan Kahn, suggested he take the role, telling Joe that "Shakespeare might offer a good thing." The only Bill Shakespeare Joe had heard of was the twenty-year-old college football player who played halfback for the University of Notre Dame—was *he* in it, Brown wanted to know?[43] Brown reluctantly agreed to meet Reinhardt, who wooed him in broken English, telling him, "Und ven Brown nodded to me und schmiled—und ven he schmiled Brown faded oudt und Flute faded in." Brown later claimed to not understand the part of Flute, and had he understood, he would have turned down a part that required him to flirt with Jimmy Cagney.

> I was outraged, scared, and obviously wrong as a female impersonator. But that's why Reinhardt put me in it. My look of shame and guilt was just what the role required. Reinhardt insisted that I play it straight.[44]

The studio didn't play it straight, though, and attempted to get Brown's participation on the cheap. Hal Wallis thought that the picture would be done outside of Brown's contract and suggested that it was a nice opportunity for Joe, a special prestige event.

"Hard-handed men which never labored in their minds till now." Shakespeare's working-class heroes culled from the Warner Bros. stock company.

Ivan Kahn, the actor's agent, interrupted the producer: "You mean he's to do this whole thing and not get any money?" Jack Warner stepped in.

> "Oh," said Jack [Warner], "we'll probably give him a present of some kind."
>
> "For instance?" asked Ivan doggedly.
>
> "Well, perhaps a Packard car or a Cadillac or something like that."
>
> Ivan said, "A Packard? A Cadillac? And Jack, what would my commission be, a bicycle?"

An outside contract was drawn up, providing the comedian afternoons off when the horses were running at Santa Anita racetrack.[45]

Another Warner comedian, Hugh Herbert, was originally cast as Peter Quince, and the utility player Frank McHugh was to be Snug the Joiner (who plays "Lion" in the play-within-the-play). When Herbert became ill in mid-December, Wallis switched McHugh over to Quince, which allowed rehearsals to go forward. Snug was offered to gravel-voiced Eugene Pallette, who turned the part down on December 27. Dieterle filled it with Dewey Robinson, a burly favorite who had given an evocative physical performance

Sheila Brown: Portrait of the Changeling as a Young Girl

for Dieterle as a selfless mute in *6 Hours to Live* and whose husky frame made him visually suitable as "Lion."[46] Herbert was recast as Snout the Tinker, memorably portraying "Wall" in the play-within-the-play, twittering his way through the unseemly courtship of James Cagney and Joe E. Brown.

Perversely, the only Englishman in the entire enterprise is Arthur Treacher, who, as "Epilogue" in the play-within-the-play, utters not a single word. In the entire film is heard nothing remotely resembling a British accent. The only speaking cast member who could lay claim to the British Empire was South African–born Ian Hunter as Theseus, Duke of Athens (a role originally considered for Warren William).[47] His conquered Queen of the Amazons, Hippolyta, hailing from Washington state, was Verree Teasdale. Their patrician bearing and strictly mid-Atlantic theatrical voices lend regal bearing to characters given little to do other than speak and strut with the aspect of sovereigns.

There were many small parts—literally—to be filled. Angelo Rossitto, a dwarf just shy of three feet in height (it is he who famously proffers the loving cup to Olga Baclanova in MGM's *Freaks*) appears consecutively in Perc Westmore rubber masks as four different spirits: a water sprite, a forest troll, a hobgoblin horn player, and the elfin conductor of a band of musical gnomes. The gnomes and elves are modeled on the famous 1908 Arthur Rackham illustrations for the play. In turn, their appearance here as a musical ensemble of trolls and creatures is George Lucas's obvious template for the cantina sequence in the first *Star Wars*.

Titania's personal attendants are played by children. Katherine Frye is Peaseblossom (she was also a stand-in for the Indian Prince). Cobweb is played by Helen Westcott, the daughter of Warner contract player Gordon Westcott. Mustard Seed is Billy Barty, an eleven-year-old dwarf in pictures since 1927. By the time he appeared in *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* Barty had already played Mickey Rooney's kid brother in countless "Mickey McGuire" shorts. At Warner Bros. he was unforgettable as the obnoxious toddler spying on whoopee makers in the "Pettin' in the Park" number of *Gold Diggers of 1933*.

FAIRY KINGS, CHANGELING BOYS, AND BALDING BOTTOMS

The oddest child character is the Indian Prince, a "changeling" spoken of but never present in Shakespeare's play. In folklore a changeling is a human child stolen by a spirit and reared in the fairy realm. The fairy's own magical offspring, usually wizened and deformed, is exchanged in its place. As late as December 14, a boy named Bobby Kolb was scheduled to play the Prince, but when the first day of shooting arrived on December 19, 1934, there was a changeling in the cast. The Indian Prince was portrayed by a five-year-old girl, Sheila Brown, her shoulder-length hair neatly tucked up in a turban, and her little girl's face conferring a disarmingly androgynous beauty.

Androgyny has trailed this little character ever since the 1960s when underground gay filmmaker, Satanist, and Hollywood babbler-on Kenneth Anger reinvented his résumé and began claiming in interviews that he was Reinhardt's "Changeling Prince" (much more lubricious than an "Indian Prince"). "This rite of passage scampering in spangles and plumes through Reinhardt's enchanted wood remains the shining moment of my childhood," he beamed.[48] Anger codified the fiction in 1974 when he appended a photograph of Sheila Brown as his author's portrait to the jacket of his book *Hollywood Babylon*. In such a context the infant Prince, sporting lamé turban, ostrich plumes, and bangles, took on the aspect of a diminutive drag queen—probably the very effect sought by Anger.

Sheila Brown had no subsequent movie career and has proven impossible to trace but her existence is fully documented by studio records and production photographs. Billy Barty shared scenes with Brown and recalled her fondly to this writer in 1998, even mentioning that he attended grade school with her. She would work as the Prince through January 22, 1935, and then vanish into the mists of time.

Sewing circle: Shelia Brown isn't the least bit angered as she and Anita Louise attend to their needlepoint and knitting.

Two male roles stubbornly resisted filling until the last minute: Oberon, King of Fairies, and Nick Bottom the Weaver. Tradition portrayed Bottom as stout, balding, and of late middle age. Reinhardt had cast the Bowl production with a sixty-one-year-old bit player,

Making an ass out of a Public Enemy: Perc Westmore gives James Cagney his head.

Raymond Brown. Movie comedians Leon Errol and Ford Sterling, and English stage actor George Hassell were considered. Undated notes in German list Wallace Beery and W. C. Fields as candidates.[49] The suggestion of Fields was brilliant, and of course Dieterle understood the Fields persona, having directed him in *Her Majesty Love* in 1931. Unfortunately, Nick Bottom was a signature role for Fields that was not to be. Fields was already deep into *David Copperfield* at MGM and due back at Paramount for *Mississippi*. The part was filled from the studio pool with paunchy and balding contract player Guy Kibbee. He screen tested as Bottom and was approved.

But it wasn't that simple. Another contract player's name from the top of the list would not go away. He was the polar opposite of roly-poly Guy Kibbee. Young, lithe, athletic, thirty-five-year-old James Cagney was one of the studio's biggest stars.[50] On October 26, head of make-up Perc Westmore let it be known that if Cagney were picked, he needed him immediately to begin the six-week process of manufacturing his enchanted donkey head.

Wallis equivocated and wrote Henry Blanke on November 1:

> The more I think of it the more sold I become on GUY KIBBEE to play the part of BOTTOM. CAGNEY is a far-fetched idea and so far in mentioning it to any number of people—all of them familiar with the play—none of them can visualize CAGNEY in it. KIBBEE is the popular conception of the part and I think we should decide on him for it.[51]

With only Oberon, King of Fairies, to be resolved, casting director Max Arnow published the final cast list on November 8 and Guy Kibbee was "in" as Bottom. On December 5, with rehearsal starting the next day, Kibbee's name still appears on the schedule but by December 17, with production opening in forty-eight hours, Kibbee was out and James Cagney was definite.

Cagney recalled that, "Reinhardt looked at me, and said, 'Ein gutter Schauspieler!'—a good actor!"[52] The rationale for Cagney's casting is obvious: the picture needed a headliner, not a sluggish supporting player in a leading role. Cagney was as commercially correct as he was aesthetically wrong. Putting him in the *Dream* cost the play its comic spectacle of a middle-aged blowhard unexpectedly surprised by love and magic. As Andre Sennwald would note in his review, "Cagney is too dynamic an actor to play the torpid and obstinate dullard."[53]

English critics thought that advance praise of Cagney's work was sheer nonsense, but conceded the role "a worthy effort from an artist who specializes in quick-hitting truck drivers."[54] Cagney was stung by the criticism. "I don't know what the hell they wanted," he later complained.[55] Looking back on his performance many years later, Cagney offered his approach to the character, saying, "The only thing I was going by is that Bottom was the greatest ham that Shakespeare had ever written. He wanted to play all the parts. The keynote was that the son-of-a-bitch was a ham."[56]

To be fair, Cagney successfully reinvented the part and made it his own. As Bottom he bristles with energy and hubris, supremely confident and virile. The same cannot be said of the other major male leads. Dick Powell, pressed into service as the young lover Lysander, is inexcusable. Powell's tenor singing voice was a hallmark of Warner Bros. musicals like *42nd Street* and *Footlight Parade,* and casting him as the male ingénue was a gambit to draw his fans. More than any other cast member, Powell was in over his head and he knew it, protesting from the start that Shakespeare and he were a ridiculous fit, but as a contract player, he had no say in the matter without risking suspension.[57] Ross Alexander, as Demetrius, was a capable contract player, no more and no less, as remarkable as a glass of water. His greatest acting coup was managing to escape embarrassing himself as fully as poor Dick Powell.

Likewise Jean Muir, as Helena: she hit her marks, she chortled her lines, but she brought nothing to the production except a tendency to be combative with Reinhardt. Possibly as part of Warner's policy of embarrassing recalcitrant actors as a way of disciplining a thoroughbred to keep the entire stable in line, her behavior was leaked to the newspapers:

> Miss Muir had as many ideas as Max Reinhardt about how the rôle of Helena should be portrayed and, although she now says that she wishes she had listened more attentively to the director, the memory of the discord lingers in the Warner mind. The sequences over which there was the most controversy are being eliminated from the print for general release . . . During shooting, Reinhardt's instructions invariably failed to coincide with the theories of Miss Muir. After some moments of argument, the director would say with noticeable resignation: "All right, just go ahead and give your interpretation."[58]

In their desperation to open up the play, the writers had even invented a new character. In early January 1935 while the film was shooting, word leaked that Bottom the weaver would now have a wife. Was it possible, wondered the *Los Angeles Times,* that Warner Bros. would stage a riposte to Cagney's famous brutalization of Mae Clarke in *The Public Enemy?* Would Mrs. Bottom mash James Cagney's face with a grapefruit?[59] Three sequences were filmed with Sara Haden as Bottom's shrewish wife, attempting to keep him home nights and away from his play rehearsals. In the penultimate scene, Bottom returns home following his enchanted night out and spies his wife at a tub of laundry. In his eyes she dissolves into a fleeting vision of Titania, then back into a harpy as, shuddering, Bottom makes a quick retreat to Peter Quince's house. Hal Wallis thought the action exaggerated and overdone. Sensibly, "Bride of Bottom" hit the cutting room floor.[60]

Oberon, the Fairy King, was the most problematic part to cast. Contract player Donald Woods was the favored prototype, though casting notes suggest everyone from Fredric March, Brian Aherne, and Leslie Howard to Colin Clive, Franchot Tone, Laurence Olivier, Doug Fairbanks Jr., and Lawrence Tibbet. There clearly is no "type" other than a trim build and stage diction. Leif Erickson had played him in Reinhardt's Chicago run of the play, and, though Reinhardt encouraged him to apply for the film, the studio wasn't interested.

Word got around town that there was a casting impasse, prompting Irving Pichel to offer himself as Oberon. Sorry, lied Henry Blanke, we're "full up," as he scheduled a screen test of Donald Woods.[61] The way Pichel plays the vampire's manservant in 1936's *Dracula's Daughter* (all doom, gloom, and *basso profundo*) indicates he would have made a success of Oberon, but his physical chunkiness was against him. In responding to a wardrobe test of an unidentified actor Wallis noted:

> I am looking at a test of "OBERON"—that is of a costume test, and the face looks very dirty. It doesn't give you the impression of his wearing a costume,

> but instead it looks like he is covered with mud . . . we will have to have more of a costume devised as the loincloth that this particular man is dressed in, as I don't think any of our actors have the physique necessary for a character of this kind. It may be that this is the costume for Oberon's men . . . in this case of course it is okay.[62]

At the eleventh hour, Victor Jory would be engaged for the role. He bore a passing resemblance to Donald Woods, less handsome but sharing the same dark intensity. More importantly, Jory had the acting chops that Woods lacked.

FIREMAN, SAVE MY STUDIO

Rehearsal of the "Scherzo" was set to begin on December 5, with the first day of shooting on December 12. What wasn't scheduled was the "Inevitable Unexpected," the unforeseen calamity that can utterly decimate timetables and budgets.

At about 9:30 on the night of December 4, 1934, a twenty-six-year-old studio driver, Rex Schroetter, parked his car outside the Barham Boulevard gate and walked onto the lot to learn if there was a job for him in the morning. Arriving at the guard shack, he saw sparks shooting up in the night sky over the sound stages. Quickly he alerted the guard who summoned the Studio Fire Department.[63]

The fire had started in a machine shop and spread immediately to the prop warehouse. First responders to the blaze were director Michael Curtiz and seventy-five extras dressed as coal miners, who had been nearby taking the last scene for the Paul Muni picture *Black Fury.* By the time studio fire chief Al Rounder and his brigade responded, the fire was raging out of control, whipped by Santa Ana winds. Fortunately the winds were blowing toward the Los Angeles River and away from the sound stages, but the back lot and many craft departments lay in its path.

Soon five fire companies from Burbank and Glendale were on the scene. Hundreds of men battled the flames, augmented by grips, carpenters, and assistant directors—any studio personnel at hand. Frank Murphy, head of the electrical department, marshaled the electricians to rig banks of brute arc lamps so the firemen could see in the smoke and darkness. People streamed in from surrounding neighborhoods to watch. Toluca Lake residents Bing Crosby, Dick Powell, and Jack Warner himself took up positions with the firefighters. Sally Eilers and Helen Morgan could be found helping Commissary Chief Katherine Higgins dole out hot coffee to the exhausted men.[64]

As the fire raced toward the river, it consumed all of the back lot sets and buildings. Reaching Barham Boulevard, it threatened to jump the divide and engulf the back

lot of Universal Pictures. Providentially the wind shifted east, driving the flames back across the devastated back lot where firefighters gained the upper hand.

After three hours the blaze was contained. Long about midnight, Chief Rounder, having directed the biggest fire scene of his career,[65] sat down on a curb to catch his breath and never got up. Rounder suffered a heart attack and died en route to the hospital.[66] At least seven others were seriously injured. A burning set collapsed on actor Rudolph Hoop, breaking his leg. Studio employee Nick Potagota also broke a leg and was burned, and another employee named Stankswitch also suffered broken bones. A score of others were burned and lacerated, including screenwriter Earl Baldwin (*Wild Boys of the Road* and *Doctor X*).[67]

Nineteen acres were consumed, nearly half of the forty-acre lot. Utterly lost were five scene docks, the plumbing shop, the prop warehouse, the grip department, the sheet metal shop, the sandblasting shop, the cabinet shop, the pattern shop, and the garage and truck shed.[68] Driver Rex Schroetter, having sounded the alert, had stayed to lend a hand and had rescued ten trucks. But eight tractors earmarked for Joe E. Brown's production *Earthworm Tractors* were lost, as was a $10,000 camera boom. Six film vaults containing stock shots and old Vitagraph productions exploded.[69] Among the sets incinerated was the corner of New York's 42nd Street and Broadway built for *42nd Street*. The next morning the *Los Angeles Times* ran a photograph of the disconsolate star of *42nd Street,* Ruby Keeler, sitting amid the wreckage "wondering where to look for her make-up box."[70]

Jack Warner announced that production would not stop and rebuilding would start immediately. In the meantime Warners' Hollywood studio on Sunset Boulevard would service all mechanical and construction needs.

The morning after the fire, Wallis postponed the day's start of rehearsals for the *Dream* to the next day. He continued the business of production, looking at dailies and revising schedules. The *Dream* was affected as all of the props that had been manufactured for the film had been lost to the flames and would have to be refabricated. Wallis moved forward as best he could.

The next day, December 6, Reinhardt began eleven rehearsal days with the cast. This was routine for the theater, unheard-of in the movies. Whatever influence Reinhardt had on the film occurred during these rehearsals. Casting continued as Victor Jory was borrowed from Columbia to play Oberon at $600 per week for eight weeks, and the movie at last had its svelte King of Shadows. Jory would stay with the picture for ten weeks. Oberon's Bat Men, as it transpired, were portrayed by half-naked bodybuilders in leafy BVDs, their faces and bodies painted black. The same day, Verree Teasdale was confirmed as Hippolyta, Queen of the Amazons.

As the fire's impact was assessed, production manager William Koenig moved the start of shooting to December 19. "I am not letting the Technical Department know about the postponement, as I want them to rush their work," he wrote Wallis.[71]

INTO THE WOODS

During the first week of rehearsal, Olivia de Havilland was unavailable. Douglas Fairbanks's niece, Florence Fair (a utility contract player given bit roles) was brought in to run Hermia's lines. Conspicuously absent from these rehearsals was Jimmy Cagney, as his participation in the film would not be confirmed until almost the start of shooting.

Though Dieterle was sometimes present, Reinhardt, who spoke virtually no English, led the rehearsals with Henry Blanke acting as interpreter and Stanley Logan coaching the actors. Talent was often sent to rehearse with the choreographer, Madame Nijinska. Erich Wolfgang Korngold was omnipresent to ensure that the metric delivery of lines, which he and Reinhardt had predetermined, was drilled into the actors. During this period some scenes with musical elements were recorded for later set playback.

Under Leo Forbstein at this time, the Warner Bros. music department provided sporadic up-tempo dance music rather than dramatic underscore, like mortar filling gaps between bricks. This was about to change radically in 1935–36 with the double advent to Warner Bros. of first Korngold, then Max Steiner and his magnificent score for *The Charge of the Light Brigade,* his first of some one hundred films for the studio. When Korngold arrived, Warners had not yet implemented Steiner's style of integrated thematic development and symphonic orchestration, and the concept of the "composed film" had not yet evolved. Michael Powell coined that expression in 1947 to describe the predetermined plotting of music and directing craft he forged with composer Brian Easdale during preproduction on *Black Narcissus.* An argument can be made for *A Midsummer Night's Dream* being one of the first dialogue films constructed in this manner. Korngold felt that

> An entirely new opus has been created—an opera spoken in rhythm, in which dialogue and music are closely connected. It required long preparation and it was probably the first time that a Hollywood picture was rehearsed for four weeks before the work on the set actually began.[72]

The preordained music provided the line and rhythm for the picture taking on set. This is precisely why Reinhardt wanted Korngold involved during shooting. He wished

Hammerklavier: Erich Wolfgang Korngold conducts on-set rehearsal with his mechanicals, James Cagney, Arthur Treacher, and Dewey Robinson. A bespectacled Hal Mohr (in white shirt) leans on the piano. Henry Blanke, in suit and tie, stands directly behind the composer.

to make the music breathe as one with the dialogue and décor, fulfilling the Wagnerian aesthetic of allied arts. Said Korngold,

> I had to make preliminary recordings—the so-called playbacks—of Mendelssohn's Scherzo and Nocturne, which were relayed over huge loudspeakers during the actual filming. Further, I conducted the orchestra on stage for complicated simultaneous "takes" and lastly, after the film was cut, I conducted a number of music pieces, which were inserted in the completed picture as background music. In addition, however, I had to invent a new method, which was a combination of all three techniques, for the music that accompanied the spoken word. I wrote out the music in advance, conducted—without orchestra—the actor on the stage in order to make him speak his lines in the required rhythm and then, sometimes weeks later, guided by earphones, I recorded the orchestral part.[73]

In selecting Korngold, it is telling that Reinhardt seems to have thought of him as an adaptor of another's music. Felix Mendelssohn's "Overture" to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was composed in 1826 when Mendelssohn was seventeen. The incidental music followed sixteen years later as an 1843 commission from the King of Prussia. Korngold arranged both works and drew on other Mendelssohn compositions (e.g., the *Songs without Words* and the Scherzo in E Minor) and bound it all together with original pastiche.

For example, the cue "Theseus' Welcome Home," the song that opens the first scene of the picture, is from the last movement of Mendelssohn's Symphony no. 3, the "Scotch" symphony. To orchestra and adult chorus, Korngold added the St. Luke's Choristers of St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Long Beach, California. Thirty-four boy sopranos and countertenors joined the adult chorus for a recording session in Burbank on Saturday, January 12, 1935, raising the vocal forces to ninety. During rehearsal, Korngold pounded mercilessly a small studio upright with the top removed, not paying too much attention to what notes he struck. After rehearsal, a little boy soprano asked the Choristers' director William Ripley Dorr, "Mr. Dorr, do you suppose they will ever be able to use that piano again?"[74]

There was a definite impulse to turn the production into a literal opera, with Shakespeare's text performed as if it were a musical line. For example, Victor Jory delivers Oberon's famous speech, "I know a bank where the wild thyme grows," against Mendelssohn's song "An die Entfernte." The actor recalled to Korngold biographer Brendan G. Carroll:

> When it came to the actual filming, Korngold lay on his stomach in the bushes, out of camera range and literally conducted my performance as though I were singing the dialogue. Reinhardt and Dieterle were in complete agreement with this. It was the first and only time I ever recall that a composer's wishes superseded those of either the director or the actor. But then, Korngold wasn't just any composer."[75]

Oberon's dialogue would be spoken as ethereal *sprechtsang* and Titania would actually sing when Anita Louise wasn't merely trilling her lines. To find a singer whose vocal color matched Anita Louise's voice, Korngold auditioned dozens of sopranos before settling on Carol Weiskopf. An urgent call reached her in San Francisco. She got the next flight to Burbank and was whisked to Stage 9 where Korngold immediately began running her through the "Slummberlade" with James Cagney. For this lullaby, sung by Titania to the bewitched weaver, Korngold adapted the "Venetian Gondola Song" from *Songs without Words* op. 19, no. 6. The other waiting singers were dismissed, and Korngold rolled into a recording session, banging the piano with one hand while conducting Weiskopf and Cagney with the other.[76]

The respect that Korngold would subsequently enjoy at Warner Bros. was absent in these early days, when he was regarded as just another Reinhardt toady. As

Reinhardt's trusted right hand, Korngold was perceived by studio management as an interloper and kept under a cloud of suspicion all through filming.[77] Jack Warner thought him a scoundrel for not gladly giving away his talents for the greater good of the studio.

> Am surprised Dr. Korngold now wants to hold us up for $2500 to conduct his score. When I agreed to send for Korngold it was understood that he would do everything whether it was in the contract or not. He certainly should take enough interest in what he is doing to conduct his score. I have informed [production manager William] Koenig to forget Korngold and Forbstein will conduct the orchestra as we see fit. Also am surprised that Korngold is going into legal technicalities on what he should not do when it was explicitly understood he was to do everything.[78]

Where Darryl F. Zanuck had been responsible for the rough-and-tumble texture of Warners' pictures in the early 1930s, so Hal Wallis mentored the sophisticated style of picture making of the late-1930s and the 1940s. Like Zanuck before him, Wallis oversaw practical production as well as creative issues. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* would be difficult to supervise on both accounts. It was a lumbering production that made huge demands on resources. The cast had to be scheduled with precision, shuttled in and out of the *Dream* to keep other productions solvent. It was artistically difficult because of the deference given to Reinhardt, who was naive about picture making.

There was a distinct attitude at the studio that the Reinhardt company had insulated itself on Stage 8, kind of a little Salzburg where all affairs were conducted inscrutably in German. The language barrier engendered a distrust of Reinhardt collaborators, and Wallis would come to worry that his line producer, in the thrall of Herr Doktor Professor, had gone over to the enemy.

As head of production, Wallis had not just this one picture but the studio's entire production schedule to worry about. On December 17, still reeling from the fire, he cautioned the production team about the need to get the star names in the cast finished quickly.

> I cannot impress upon you too strongly the necessity of finishing up the stars in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* . . . we are keeping important star pictures out of production until these people can be released.[79]

Wallis was especially annoyed that James Cagney and Joe E. Brown were scheduled in such a way that they would be "idle for three weeks on a picture when we are paying them terrific salaries and while they could be in other pictures."[80]

> I have a picture scheduled for CAGNEY on February 4th and also a JOE E. BROWN picture February 4th; and, under the present schedule, you do not expect to finish with these people until February 11th, which means we cannot possibly start them until a week or two later and we are going to have a serious shortage of important pictures in April and May when we need them.[81]

Apart from tying up major talent, the film was also monopolizing five sound stages. The schedule was prepared to accomplish the biggest action (the "Scherzo" and the "Nocturne") at the outset—everything involving phalanxes of fairies, cohorts of children, dancers, dwarfs, and animals—before moving into intimate performance and dialogue scenes.

Right away it was clear that the literal forest built by Anton Grot was impractical and was going to be "a major problem," as Hal Wallis recalled:

> Reinhardt had instructed Anton Grot to built a fairy forest that extended over two sound stages . . . the trees were made of burlap dipped in plaster of paris. But he insisted on real leaves. We sent an army of men to strip leaves from the trees of Sherwood Forest and pile them in trucks. We also dug up great quantities of moss to carpet the vale, but it was pulpy and had to be watered daily. The players got caught in it . . . I ran the first day's rushes. The screen was completely dark. There had been no room to hang sufficient lights. Reinhardt had demanded that the trees reach the top of the sound stage.[82]

In his 1980 memoirs, Wallis makes it sound as if the problem was simply a mechanical inconvenience rather than a line in the sand drawn by his stubborn director. Nor does he mention that cameraman Ernest Haller started the picture, because to do so he would have to explain the circumstances of Haller's dismissal.

On December 18, while Logan continued to rehearse the lovers and principal fairies and Korngold and Madame Nijinska ran through the "Scherzo," Dieterle jumped ahead of the schedule and made inserts of forest animals. A dark aesthetic was apparent from the first foot of film shot, and Hal Wallis sounded an alarm.

Sweet musk-roses and eglantine? Hal Mohr's homespun recipe for cobwebs and dewdrops: nylon, rubber cement, and sequins.

> I am just looking at the first day's shooting . . . as you know and as MR. WARNER has already told you, the shots are too dark. It is all well and good in our own projection room where our lamps are of high intensity . . . but when you get these same scenes out in . . . the theatres around the country the screen will be almost black . . . There is no use in making these scenes for our own amusement as that isn't going to bring in any money, and you will have to impress upon Haller that he will have to light the scenes so that they are visible . . . let's not bend over backwards to be artistic now and spoil it all.[83]

The "Scherzo" began filming the next morning on Stage 8. It was a big day. Ernest Haller arrived at 7:30, well ahead of the shooting company's 9:00 call. Two camera units covered the action in the forest as fifty-two children, ten dancing girls, ten dwarfs, an infant Changeling Prince, and two ducks danced their hearts out for Art. When the unit wrapped at 5:30, six set-ups had been made, amounting to only thirty-four seconds of approved takes. Jack Warner had spoken, Wallis had reiterated it. Dieterle had been warned and disobeyed, but he couldn't be sacked any more than Reinhardt. In these instances it is never the executive who falls on his sword. Hal Wallis simply moved down the chain and let the technician take the bullet. Ernest Haller

was fired, and Hal Mohr took over photography Saturday morning, December 22.[84]

Sometime between that date and the company's return to work on December 26, Mohr received Blanke's permission to thin Anton Grot's trees and bring in a stage crew of 150 painters to rerender the set. As Mohr recalled in a 1958 interview,

> I stayed there with them and worked with them all that night. I had gallons upon gallons of aluminum paint prepared and gallons upon gallons of high-gloss shellac prepared . . . I had painters go on what we had established as being the hard side of light, where the source of light would come from on the set, and spray everything, every tree, every blade of grass, every prop, every rock, spray it from that side with a solid coating of aluminum paint . . . And then after that was put on, so that one side of the set had the dark area, and the other side was all aluminum—they then sprayed the entire set with this high-gloss shellac. The set was just a shining glass-like sheet of aluminum and darkness. Then over this we had the special effects people come in with all the cobweb making machines we could get . . . We then proceeded to cover the whole set with this cobweb. A sheet of cobweb over the entire set, over every tree, every bush, every rock was covered with cobwebs. And then on top of that, hundreds of pounds of glass and mica particles were blown over the set onto the cobweb material while it was still soft, before it became set. Well the result was that the entire set became a fairy-like thing you would never have seen in nature, or would never see on the stage.[85]

A contemporary press report while the film was still in production adds another unsung participant to this account. It credits Frank Murphy, head of the Warner Bros. electrical department (already a hero for his actions the night of the fire) for initially proposing the solution that Mohr effected.

> After experimenting with more lights, fewer lights, different lights, and camera stances, Frank Murphy, head of the studio's electric department said: "Lights won't do any good on this set. What you have to have is paint." So the trunks of the trees were touched up, the green leaves sprayed with still greener paint, and then some with aluminum paint, the rocks were painted a more vivid mixture of grey, black, and brown. So well had Mr. Murphy guessed that the lights and camera now pick out shadow and light masses that make the entire action seem dynamic.[86]

Through the house give glimmering light: Hal Mohr's diffusion screens won him an upset Oscar, prompting the Academy to ban write-in ballots.

When the company returned after Christmas, light now penetrated the forest from above, and the silver trees caught and modeled the light. Jack Warner noted the difference immediately and wrote Henry Blanke, satisfied but cautious:

> I just saw the first day's stuff of HAL MOHR'S and it was 100% improvement over the other stuff . . . we must light up every object that we want to show and not do everything by suggestions. We'll have a great production and something that will be thought of if we just let the audience see it, as I explained to you very emphatically that the big theatres do not have enough light to light up a dark print—you know what I mean."[87]

Mohr's photographic effects for this film have never been equaled. He used Vaseline coated filters for Titania and her fairies that made their bright costumes and long blonde hair bloom into radiant pools of light. His photographic treatment of Oberon took its cue from Max Reé's wardrobe design: a reflective jet body suit studded with sequins and splayed with cobwebs across his crown. Mohr custom-built several diffusion scrims, wooden frames approximately two-by-three feet, placed in front of the camera and loosely stretched with nylon. These remained flimsy, while holes were selectively burned away with a cigarette for vignette areas Mohr wished to stay in critical focus. Small metallic sequins were arrayed in the nylon with rubber cement. The nylon and sequins close to the lens caught the light and appeared as circles of confusion. Oberon was seen as if through cobwebs spangled with dewdrops. If a side light were directed onto the scrim

during the shot, a shimmering film of twinkling cobwebs would seem to materialize in front of the actor. This otherworldly treatment marked each appearance of Oberon.

DIRECTION BY DOPPELGANGER

Reinhardt on the set was a counterproductive nightmare. Special Effects cameraman Byron Haskin recalled how the "Scherzo" had been preplanned, approved, and then changed at the last minute. A huge glass plate, with carefully hollowed channels fit to the shapes of the fairy dancers, was placed before the camera. The channels were to act like distortion lenses so each girl would appear to rise from mist into clear focus. In Haskin's words:

> Enter the new element of Mr. Reinhardt, Mr. Dieterle and Mr. Blanke . . . All speaking German. The great Mr. Reinhardt must lend his magic touch to this project. His magic touch consisted of coming on the set, talking in German to the dance director, ordering the rehearsal according to his specifications. After a long, noisy dialogue . . . he staged the scherzo backwards! And despite fierce objections, that's the way we shot it! . . . He faced [the dancers] *away,* backs from the camera. His idea was that we were all technicians, therefore, we're the theatre performing to the audience out there somewhere beyond. Blanke . . . was listening only to Reinhardt—in German! There was so much screaming.[88]

At times the set resembled a belligerent session of the League of Nations, with Dieterle struggling to hold the threads of production together by sheer willpower and a loud Teutonic voice. A reporter visiting the set reported that "Kaiser" Wilhelm commanded his troops, perched on a twenty-foot-high platform nicknamed the "Tower of Babel,"

> on which stands a camera, flanked by cameramen, an electrician, Director Dieterle, and his assistant. The last mentioned is yelling orders into a microphone that is connected with a set of loud speakers from which come a jumble of instructions.
>
> Up there on the Tower of Babel, the tall, gaunt and efficient Dieterle is waving his white gloved hands and giving instructions in broken English, the players below are attempting to understand him, and growing more bewildered. At

> the foot of the platform mill a half-dozen assistants and interpreters all trying to interpret Dieterle's orders in differently pitched dialects.
>
> And through it all Max Reinhardt moves quietly, smiling and nodding, or shaking his head. As the assistants rush into the mob, shouting conflicting instructions, Max Reinhardt restores order, in his friendly, paternal manner.[89]

"Dieterle was supposed to do most of the directing, but Reinhardt was telling him what to do," remembered James Cagney.[90] In the theater, Reinhardt would act out every gesture, hit every mark, recite every intonation for the actor, and then demand that they exactly mimic his instructions. Olivia de Havilland, a teenage neophyte, was captivated by this technique during the rehearsals for the Hollywood Bowl performances, but seasoned movie actors like Cagney understood the failing of Reinhardt's technique on the motion picture stage. Here was Herr Doktor Professor indicating what he wanted the actor to do by gesturing wildly to the galleries, as if there were still 15,000 people sitting in the Hollywood Bowl, rather than the audience of one lone Mitchell camera with its unblinking glass eye. Cagney recalled the thunderstruck cast standing in the shadows of Stage 8, watching Reinhardt flail and twist, and whispering to each other, "Somebody ought to tell him."[91] In later years, Cagney could point to receiving only one firm direction from Reinhardt, the business of "trembling like a leaf" as Bottom discovers he is bewitched.

In 1998, this writer asked Mickey Rooney what it had been like to have two directors on *A Midsummer Night's Dream.* Mr. Rooney looked puzzled and said, "I only had one director." When asked who that was, with no hesitation he replied, "Mr. Dieterle."[92]

Dieterle would recall,

> The technique of picture making was new to him. He was very shy about it. He would rehearse the actors. When he thought it was right, he would sit down and I would arrange it for the cameras . . . we did have a hard time getting started because of the script. Reinhardt wanted to be absolutely faithful to Shakespeare's dialogue, but he kept adding elaborate pantomime sequences. He had brilliant ideas, but we had to remind him that the film as he conceived it with all Shakespeare's scenes plus Reinhardt's embellishments would be too long.[93]

Belatedly, the front office acknowledged that Dieterle, the movie man, was in charge. Reinhardt's presence was an inconvenience that had to be tolerated and worked around:

"When Reinhardt thought it was right, he would sit down and I would arrange it for the cameras." Reinhardt, Helene Thimig, and Henry Blanke sit at the feet of director William Dieterle. Hal Mohr, also serving, stands and waits.

> I realize the fact that PROFESSOR REINHARDT is on the set, and that this is the way the scene would normally be played in the theatre or wherever it was staged, but don't forget that the staging of "MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM" in the BOWL took almost three hours, and we don't want to run into the situation at the end of the picture of finding that we have about sixteen reels of film that we can't cut down because it is paced too slowly.[94]

Reinhardt's behavior boded to eclipse the legend of another fastidious Viennese director, Erich von Stroheim:

> Reinhardt's devotion to detail beggars description. If a button is missing from the most inconsequential costume he will instantly demand a halt until the mistake is remedied . . . Time, labor, inconvenience, and expense apparently mean nothing to him.[95]

But where Stroheim built his details into a masterful whole, for Reinhardt detail and ornament were ends in themselves. It was the perfect shell game: since he had no idea how to make a movie, creating a fuss over costumes and fripperies was his

way to leave his mark on the enterprise. If production had to halt for some gewgaw or gimcrack, it was a test to prove just how powerful Reinhardt was. That Henry Blanke permitted such behavior gave the impression that Reinhardt was in control, and in so doing endorsed its own twisted reality.

When the troupe of tradesmen first enter the forest to rehearse their play, Reinhardt suddenly fixated on the fact that Hugh Herbert had nothing in his hands and demanded that Herbert carry an Elizabethan hornpipe that very instant. The prop man did not have one to hand, causing Reinhardt to snap (with the company and cameras standing by), "Make it."

> The research department found a photograph and a description of one . . . an order was sent to the woodwork department to turn exactly the right pipe from exactly the right wood. Another order was sent out for a beef bladder, because a beef bladder was the correct wind bag for such a hornpipe. It was delivered on the set exactly twenty-five minutes after Reinhardt said, "Make it."

During the "Scherzo," one little fairy was to be seen playing a violin using a moonbeam for a bow. Borrowing from Busby Berkeley's "Shadow Waltz" sequence in *Gold Diggers of 1933,* a neon light tube was used as the violin's lunar-light bow. But not just any Screen Actors Guild fairy would do, Reinhardt had to have the most beautiful one! Told there were several beauties on hand, Reinhardt became sullen, He Who Will Not Be Denied:

> "No," was his quiet but blunt retort, "she must be a violin player so her fingering will be right." . . . and so the casting department had to send out a call for the most beautiful violin player in Hollywood.[96]

Patsy Bedell from Memphis, Tennessee, was the lucky girl so selected. Is she pretty? Is her fingering accurate? It's terribly hard to judge. She barely registers, appearing on screen for seventy-two frames.

And so it went: while Dieterle struggled to shape the forces on Stage 8 into a major motion picture, Reinhardt remained mired in the minutiae of buttons and moonbeams and beef bladders. When Herr Doktor Professor himself wasn't demanding in his own Germanic voice, he used Teutonic ventriloquism, deputizing composer Korngold as his proxy voice to bark orders across departmental lines. Hal Wallis relayed his displeasure to "Heinz" Blanke:

> There is some difficulty between the JACKMAN DEPARTMENT and KORNGOLD in the length of the shot of "TITANIA" sliding down the moon-beam with the fairies . . . KORNGOLD is notifying JACKMAN that he has about thirty or forty feet to make the shot fit with the music, and JACKMAN feels it will take about eighty feet to get this shot over . . . KORNGOLD will have to write the score after the shot is made, and if KORNGOLD has to go back to Europe before this is all possible, we will have to be protected with enough music written so that we can play around with it in any way we want when we go to score the picture . . . in order for [JACKMAN] to fit in with KORNGOLD'S music we are going to sacrifice some great effects, and this we absolutely will not do. You had better have a talk with KORNGOLD and everyone else concerned . . . unless you can have this understood with DIETERLE very clearly I am going to have to call a meeting with everyone concerned, as I don't want DIETERLE telling anybody he has so many feet in which to do a certain thing, as the picture isn't going to be made on that basis."[97]

BAD DREAMS

About this time, the "Inevitable Unexpected" made its second appearance of the season as another fire broke out, this time on Stage 8. Actress Margaret Kerry, then four years old and appearing in her first acting role as "Peggy Lynch,"[98] portrayed one of the fairies in Titania's train. She recalled,

> We were on grassy risers in the forest set near a little stream. Big arc lights ringed the scene, maybe 100 feet away, up high, but we could hear them hissing. Suddenly somebody on the catwalk called, "Fire!" An arc light on the catwalk had caught. The flames seemed quite high, maybe three or four feet above the top of the arc housing, right against the stage wall. Flaming bits were dropping down onto the set. Someone shouted, "Everybody out!" and all these kids were filed out. I was straggling at the edge of the group when Mickey Rooney grabbed me by the arm and pulled me into this little stream in the middle of the set. Mickey and I stayed there maybe four or five minutes while they put the fire out. We had to shut down for maybe an hour break.[99]

Eddie Selzer, head of publicity, related the fire episode to journalist Inez Wallace.[100] In his telling, the cellophane of Titania's train ignited (it may have sparked from fiery bits of the carbon rod falling from the catwalk) but was quickly patted out by Victor

Jory and William Dieterle, who singed their hands (if true, their distress would have been minimal; Jory wore gloves as part of his wardrobe and Dieterle wore white gloves as an affectation).

Many years later, this minor incident was conflated by Kenneth Anger, the ersatz changeling, into a lurid tale of roasted flesh and dark studio intrigue. The author of *Hollywood Babylon* would recount a juicy "insider" version of the *Dream* fire in which horribly scorched babies were hushed up by Warner Bros.[101]

On Friday, December 28, scenes were made with a trained bear that apparently died on the stage.[102] The "Scherzo" wrapped at 10:30 that night. The company rolled right into the huge "Nocturne."

NIGHT OF THE NOCTURNE

Every Warner Bros. musical had to sport a "killer" production number. Stylistically, Dieterle's and Nijinska's take on Mendelssohn's Nocturne is merely a high-toned iteration of Busby Berkeley's "Pettin' in the Park" in *Gold Diggers of 1933* or "Goin' to Heaven on a Mule" from *Wonder Bar.*

Jack Warner sought the advice of Busby Berkeley to get his take on Shakespeare. "Berkeley offered a suggestion tonight on DREAM that should be taken seriously—or at least a trial made of same. To get over the effects of the 'dream portion' of it, he suggested we go to some proper tint . . . You can't tell . . . it may be a crackerjack idea."[103]

The sequence is represented in the final script only by this statement:

> This dance is in the shadows and in a blue tint, and parts of it will be photographed in slow motion. This NOCTURNAL contains Theilade's big dance, "Flight to the Moonlight." (This is a PLAYBACK) (A special layout will be handed to the respective departments.)[104]

This special two-page layout titled "Nocturno" was thoroughly conceptualized by Dieterle and distributed as a handout apart from the script. Curiously, it is conceived impressionistically, rather than in terms of practical shooting concerns.

> Follow Puck through the woods with the camera. He runs, flourishing the veil and alarms all the creatures of the night. Suddenly there begins a strange, exciting commotion in the forest. A wind arises, sweeps with a rush through all trees and bushes, and sets the trees groaning . . . One is aware of an uncanny rustling that foreshadows the ending of the night. The moonlight grows pale

> and cold and in that pallid light hurry the transparent creatures of the night, urgently hastening in close-packed throng into the deep shadows of the forest . . . and in the blue-black shadows which advance very slowly, from the thick forest in the background across the meadow, OBERON appears.
>
> He is standing in a dark chariot, holding his four black horses on a tight rein. The shadow moves forward with them, and gradually covers the meadow. A long blue-black mantle hangs from OBERON'S shoulders, stretching far out behind him. The fairies crowd under this mantle . . . close to OBERON a file of dark elves and night spirits with white ecstatic dream faces . . . behind them the fairies now heavily veiled in dark veils, and at the edge of Oberon's mantle there crowd close together the apparently numberless array of little, lovely, and grotesque dream creatures.[105]

As Oberon leads his night creatures in retreat from the advancing dawn, the visual concept was for Oberon to be the Prince of Darkness, literally. To this end, he was dressed in black and painted black. Wallis had hated this concept in preproduction the first week in December, and he still hated it now on New Year's Eve.

> I'm just looking at a test labeled "TITANIA AND OBERON" in which OBERON's face is blacked up as in the earlier tests. It seems to me we talked about this and it was decided that JORY'S face would be shown very clearly. This is the way we want it done.[106]

On Saturday, December 29, word reached Wallis that, two hours after the call, the company had still not begun shooting and there was ostensible friction between the sound and picture staffs (more likely between the Reinhardt partisans and the studio loyalists). Henry Blanke had forsaken his role as Warner watchdog and capitulated completely to the Germans. Wallis had to go on the stage to set things right. For the head of production to appear on the shooting stage for other than a courtesy visit was a chilling event, usurping the credibility of the production supervisor and undermining the authority of the director.

Upon returning to his office, Wallis dictated a stern memo to Blanke:

> I am writing you this note as a reminder that what I tried to do on the set today is what you should be doing all the time you are down there . . . you are representing the production end of the studio and I should not have to come

> down there and tell [sound] mixer [Dave Forrest] and [dialogue director Stanley] Logan the things that I did today. It should be up to you and you should fight just as hard to have these things accomplished as I do. You should not fight the other way.

The sound mixer's dissatisfaction caused a long shot to be remade multiple times and Logan was calling for retakes based on niggling missed inflections, with the result that hours were wasted. Wallis was not pleased.

> Today, we did not get a take until 3:30 in the afternoon . . . I see no necessity for making a long shot of a scene running two and a half minutes four or five times. I guarantee you that if I have the first take printed up, we will find that it is satisfactory . . . Logan questioning the inflection of one word or something is silly . . . we definitely cannot fall behind on this picture not only because of the cost involved on this particular picture but because we have so many important stars tied up and if we do not get them out of "MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM," at the time we figured, it is going to seriously cripple our program for the next two months and this I cannot allow to happen.
>
> You should watch these things Blanke, and I am relying on you to follow through on this picture and see that they do not waste time and money needlessly. I am very much worried over the length of time we have lost to date, even on the first few days shooting, and if we are going to continue the procedure that we did today, that is, not getting a take until 3:30 in the afternoon, it is going to be a serious matter. You will just have to take charge of the situation and handle it the same as Koenig would or I would if we were there all day.[107]

The next morning, Madame Nijinska started rehearsing her dancers to playback as Reinhardt, Dieterle, and Hal Mohr watched. The "Nocturne" would seem a rewarding showcase for Nijinska and her *première danseuse,* Nina Theilade, but in fact Madame Nijinska had a miserable time at Warner Bros. Speaking in Russian-inflected French, she told the *Los Angeles Times:*

> It is not entirely clear to me why they sent for me to come from Paris, for in the first conference I had with the executives and directors, I was told they were not interested in ballet. To say the least this was bewildering . . . The dancers given me as material to work with were well trained and very quick . . . Those

Pavlovian protégée *contra* Brawny Bat Men: "They are willing to work with cheap music and to sacrifice the art for camera angles."

> who have authority in Hollywood are not so quick in understanding what is necessary for creative ballet. They are willing to work with cheap music and to sacrifice the art for camera angles, which to them are important.[108]

If Madame considered Korngold's music "cheap," the consideration was mutual; Korngold didn't care for Madame Nijinska, either.

It became clear that Reinhardt had no clue about the language or mechanics of films. He shadowed Dieterle, trying to get him to execute his baroque notions about theatrical delivery of the dialogue. Compounding Reinhardt's obstinacy, the fact that none of the players had training or significant experience in classical theatre, and the innately alien quality of Elizabethan English to the American ear, the cavernous sets made it difficult to obtain intelligible sound recording. Wallis knew that the result wasn't acceptable.

> The thing that bothers me considerably is the sound which in many shots—especially the medium and long shots—sounds fuzzy. There is no crispness

> to the dialogue and, while this is due to some extent to the Shakespearean language, I believe it is also due to the placing of the microphone. And also the people are not speaking up enough. Everything is being done in soft voices and as a result the stuff that we get is fuzzy and indistinguishable . . . I noticed it particularly when DICK POWELL and the girl made an entrance—that dialogue in back of the tree . . . you are hardly able to understand. The entire scene in the long shot is practically useless as you can't understand the people and naturally we will move into closer shots anyhow. This brings me to the point that I had the first long shot take printed up—that is, the take that I saw you make when I was on the stage, and I find that it is just as good in every respect as the fourth take, which you finally okayed.[109]

Wallis knew the set was large and unwieldy, so he recommended that the issue be addressed by camera placement:

> Much to my surprise it was hard to understand "PUCK" . . . In the first shot where he did his lines with the accompaniment of the celeste it was better, but one thing we will have to do on all of these people—especially when they are speaking these lines of poetry—is to have a camera on them close enough to see their mouths, so that we can see them speak the lines as well as hear them.[110]

Wallis remembered the annoying eccentricity of the Fairy Queen in the December tests, and decided to be proactive:

> So far I have not seen ANITA LOUISE in any of the dailies, but in the tests I saw of her she was inclined to be sing-songee and inclined to draw breaths and dramatize everything, and you'll have to watch her very carefully on this, too.[111]

Wallis thought Korngold might be responsible for the affectation and worried that his imported composer, a neophyte in cinema, was overstepping his bounds:

> I am concerned that Korngold is stepping in too much as to how the people should speak and how it is going to fit in with his music, and I would rather not have him on the set at all if this is going to be the case. He knows nothing whatever about pictures, and I don't want him to have any say at all in how

the people are to speak, or whether they are to speak like fairies or anything of the kind. All I want him to concern himself with is the music.[112]

The "Nocturne" went before the cameras on January 3. A typical casting call for the "Nocturne" was forty-eight dancing girls, thirty children (with of course, thirty stage mothers!), twenty-eight bat men, plus of course the seventy-five-plus members of the shooting company. Kibitzers and lookie-loos swelled the mass of human bodies until Stage 8 looked less like the Warner Bros. lot than the Marx Brothers' stateroom in *A Night at the Opera*. A memo was issued insisting there were to be "NO VISITORS to Stage 8 as it is terribly congested. This includes wives and friends of the director."[113]

Dieterle got most of his fantasy placed before Hal Mohr's camera on Stage 8 but the sweeping wind and myriads of elves, night creatures, and dancing girls under the great black mantle failed to impress Hal Wallis. How could he be impressed when they were invisible? Wallis thundered at Dieterle, heaping on the sarcasm:

I am just looking at OBERON'S entrance—with his men and with the girls under the robe and all that business. It is so artistic and so clever that I don't think even you will know what it is all about when you look at it on the screen.

The bottom half of the screen is greased too much—too much Vaseline—so that you can't see anything and, had I not seen the take this morning, I would never have known that there were supposed to be dancing girls under OBERON'S robe. Everything is so dark and so greased that it is nothing but a series of blank film as far as I am concerned, The close shot of OBERON'S men going by the camera is a total loss—it might just as well be blank leader running through the camera, and this great idea of having the girls under a black cloth is something that I can't figure out, because how you are ever expected to see them under there no one will ever know.

We had better stop trying to be too clever with this stuff and begin to tell our story and light up our people and our set so that we know what the hell it is all about . . . The whole God-damned day's work is practically ruined. You can't make out OBERON or his men or anything else.

For the last time I am telling you to cut out the artistic stuff and let's light up the people and begin to see what the hell we are photographing, as I am getting just about fed up on it.

There's a shot of OBERON being brought right into a foreground here . . . you can't even see his face—he's got too much make-up on. I warned you,

Don't Knock the Nocturne: "Just keep the stuff more like this now and we won't have to keep hounding you."

> when we talked about OBERON . . . that this is one character that we wanted to see, and you persisted in putting a black or a grey clay on his face so you can't even make him out. Why wasn't he left with his face natural as I asked him to be? I was afraid you were going to go to an extreme in this, and I cautioned you, but despite that fact, you still went ahead and did it your way and of course it is wrong.[114]

The "Nocturne" went for retakes. For a time, Wallis was placated.

> The last day's dailies are much better. The stuff is lighter. You can see what is going on. Your new shots of Oberon's train coming right into the camera are splendid. The Bat Men show up and the whole thing is much better . . . Just keep the stuff more like this now and we won't have to keep hounding you.[115]

The "Nocturne" wrapped January 6, including retakes. Wallis instructed Hal Mohr that "from now on everything should be brightly lighted so that we can see the people."

> I know you have had a tough job and that it is a difficult set but I feel that now that we are getting into more intimate action, we can get a type of photography that we have been after since the picture started.[116]

Of course they *had* been getting the photography that was wanted—the photography that Dieterle and Reinhardt wanted. Firing Ernest Haller was just window dressing. It hadn't cured anything. Wallis copied the Mohr memo to Dieterle with a cover note stressing that he wanted no more incidents that Jack Warner might complain about, such as the scene of Rooney squeezing the love juice into Dick Powell's eyes. The thorny Shakespearean dialogue was better understood if you could watch the actor's lip movement. Wallis reminded Dieterle that in one scene it was impossible to understand Rooney because

> you didn't have the low camera shooting from Powell's body up over Rooney . . . I hope it won't be necessary for me to write any more letters about the photography, or about anything else for that matter, as we certainly should have profited by the mistakes of the past two weeks . . . we should shoot [the *Dream*] like any other picture and not have to complain about too much diffusion, not enough light on the people, not seeing the people nor hearing them talk and similar matters. Let's level on this from now on and see if we cannot show a radical change.[117]

Clearly, Wallis's edict of January 3 following the first "Nocturne" dailies had been sobering, and from then on complaints about the photography diminished. While photographic discontents still occurred (in the January 10 dailies, the entire day's output of one camera in a multiple camera set-up was out of focus), by January 12, Wallis reported that he and Jack Warner were now very happy with the dailies. The photography was lighter, the "crusher" production numbers were in the can, and there was hope that Anita Louise might actually stop speaking like a demented toddler. It was just about time for the "Inevitable Unexpected" to put in a third appearance.

A PAIR OF PUCKS AND A DYSPHASIC DIVA

On Sunday, January 13, a fresh snowfall beckoned Mickey Rooney to Big Bear Lake where he took his first toboggan ride, promptly ran afoul of some Jeffrey pines, and broke his leg. Jack Warner didn't get angry at him, remembered Rooney; Jack Warner went insane. First,

"I'm gonna break his other leg." Mickey Rooney in Hollywood Presbyterian Hospital, January 1935.

announced the studio chief, he would *kill* Rooney. "Then after I kill him, I'm gonna break his other leg."[118]

On set Monday morning, January 14, director Dieterle had a double handicap. Not only was his Indian Prince, Sheila Brown, out sick, but his gentle Puck was in Hollywood Presbyterian Hospital with his gentle leg in a gentle cast. Dieterle was confident that he could work around the handicap with a double until Rooney could return. Within twenty-four hours, George Breakston was signed to double for Rooney.[119]

Breakston had been Rooney's alternate for the Hollywood Bowl and had carried on the Chicago run of the play when Rooney returned to Hollywood. Consequently, he was a ready-made Puck, but his participation was not to be made public. The contract gave him $400 a week (more than twice what Rooney was being paid) but expressly denied him screen credit or publicity in connection with the film. As an incentive it promised a part in another picture, *Dinky*.[120]

When Rooney returned a month later, on February 13, he was still in a cast and his scenes were designed as close-ups and medium shots, lolling in the meadow obscured by foliage, or trundled about on a dolly obscured by ground fog. Breakston was kept on for full body movement and some ingenious *trompe l'oeil*.

Some of the substitutions are extremely simple, such as Puck "seated" in a tree, comprised of Rooney's upper body and Breakston's draped legs, the "blend" of the disparate boys disguised by tree boughs. Perhaps the cleverest example of Dieterle's resourcefulness is a continuous take that has "Breakston-Puck" race into frame, making hand gestures to Olivia de Havilland to follow him. After "Breakston-Puck" has left frame, the camera pans with de Havilland to reveal "Rooney-Puck" already planted in

the glade, repeating the same hand gestures to her. The audience's attention is so well directed that the substitution of players is never apparent.

The inventive staging required to hide Mickey's broken leg actually gives the movie some special pleasures. Rooney on a roller board, clinging to the sorrowful ladies' skirts as they unknowingly drag the mocking brat about through the fog, is one of the funniest bits of physical comedy in the movie. Puck creates the fog bank himself, and the trick was achieved with Rooney in close-up with a burning cigarette, placed lit-end down in a glass tube, which he put on his tongue. The reverse draft caused the cigarette to smolder. Rooney inhaled through his nose, blowing clouds of smoke and never tasting the tobacco.[121] Bee burners smoldering off-camera wafted ribbons of smoke into frame, completing the illusion.

As he watched dailies of Titania's scenes, Wallis realized that he had been hoodwinked by Dieterle. There was Anita Louise still giving those loopy, lilting line readings. He had been blaming Korngold for her goofball inflections, but by mid-January he realized that Reinhardt was the problem and Dieterle was enabling him. He castigated Dieterle, as if talking to an unruly child, but he failed to hide his exasperation with Reinhardt:

> It is very difficult to understand ANITA LOUISE until you get her in those big head close-up shots. I know that you must feel the same way about it, because you are protecting yourself with those big head close-ups. It seems to me you could remedy a lot of this on the set . . . You will remember when we first made tests I talked to you about this and you promised to tone her down and keep her in a more normal tone of voice . . . When you get this stuff in a big theatre . . . it is going to be very hard to understand her . . . you must have her deliver her lines as she did in "FIREBIRD," which you also directed . . . Please see that this is done immediately so that we will see a radical change in the next dailies that come through . . . the Shakespearean dialogue is a definite problem anyhow because of its poetic nature, and it is hard to understand it. In ANITA LOUISE'S case it is just twice as difficult . . . This is definitely the way we want it done and please don't deviate from it and don't give us any alibis and I know how MR. REINHARDT feels about it and all of that.[122]

The next dailies that came through were no different. Wallis exploded:

> it is not necessary for ANITA LOUISE to be as lyrical and sing-songee as she has been so far. I am further convinced that her method of delivering lines is

Not Okay For Sound: "so much head room that it is impossible for us to get any sign of crisp and intelligent dialogue recording."

> because she has been drilled and rehearsed that way by Prof. Reinhardt . . . this does not solve our problem, which is mainly and most necessarily that we *UNDERSTAND WHAT THE PEOPLE ARE TALKING ABOUT*. I tried to drill this thought into all of you before the picture started and, especially after seeing a test of ANITA LOUISE six weeks ago but no attention seemingly has been paid to my instructions . . . I insist that, in all future scenes, ANITA LOUISE speak the dialogue as she would in an ordinary picture without the fluctuations in the range of her voice, without rushing her words together and without trying to time it to music; and, if this is not done, I am going to have you go back and retake it until it is done the way I want it . . . when I, who know the story, sit in the projection room and cannot understand what the girl is talking about, it is then time to do something about it. You can discuss this with Prof. Reinhardt if you wish but I am looking for a decided difference in the dailies.[123]

The sound department learned of the front office's discontent with the audio and became defensive, worried lest they be blamed for conditions they could not control. Nathan Levinson, head of the sound department, complained bitterly to Wallis. Cagney's song, performed while wearing his enchanted donkey head, had been prerecorded in two versions, one muffled and one clear.

> After talking with you about not using the muffled song for CAGNEY, I issued very definite instructions to [sound mixers] George Groves and Dave Forrest

> that they were to use the clear song. Dieterle agreed to use the clear one, but as Mr. Korngold insisted on using the muffled song, Dieterle decided to do it both ways. They did the muffled one first, promising to do the clear one next, but as soon as they shot the picture to the muffled song playback, Dieterle absolutely refused to do it to the clear one.[124]

Where Hal Wallis's ears were hypersensitive to the performers' shortcomings, Levinson was concerned that he was turning a deaf ear to the technical compromises being foisted by the picture staff onto the sound department.

> As I have repeatedly mentioned to you [Wallis], to [production manager William] Koenig, Al Alborn [unit manager], and Blanke, I am very fearful of the final result of the sound on this picture as the Sound Department is receiving very little consideration on this production for the reason that Dieterle claims that he is being crowded so badly on his schedule that he cannot take the time to make the proper set ups to secure even our normal recording result which we get on our cheapest of pictures, and every shot has two or more cameras on which one of them always has so much head room that it is impossible for us to get any sign of crisp and intelligent dialogue recording . . . at best it cannot possibly be considered a good job . . . I don't know why we should receive so little consideration for sound on a picture of this type in which of all our pictures sound should be considered of prime importance.[125]

Everything seemed to be a compromise, every department a squeaky wheel needing oil. It all seemed to come down to Henry Blanke, the glassy-eyed "*Ja*-Man" caught in the thrall of Max Reinhardt. When Blanke wouldn't respond to Wallis, Jack Warner stepped in.

> I am in with MR. WALLIS tonight running Saturday's dailies of the "DREAM"—the scenes where all of the craftsmen were leaving for the woods. I can't understand why you on the set as the supervisor, DIETERLE as the director, that you don't use your noodle and move the camera up and take big close-ups of your comedians . . . all DIETERLE is worrying about is composition. What we are worrying about is seeing the comedians and making them look funny . . . I could have put a cape on and come in with them; no one knows who in hell

> these people are. You are doing nothing, Henry, but watching this one picture and, my God, it seems that WALLIS and I have to watch you . . . take the damned scenes . . . I'm sick and tired of continually writing these notes.[126]

About this time the Queen of the Amazons, Verree Teasdale, decided she too was sick and tired. Her Amazonian strength failed her, her costumes (which had been fitted two or three weeks prior) were suddenly too heavy, and she wanted "out" of Reinhardt's dream. That was fine with Wallis—replace her instantly with Winnie Shaw, he told William Koenig. Take Teasdale off salary and put her on suspension until the *Dream* finished shooting.

> She has been on salary all this time and now that it is just about time for her to go to work in the part, all of a sudden she finds out that she can't wear the costumes. I don't like the idea at all . . . she goes off salary now on a suspension . . . this period of suspension should be added to the present period of her contract and the option date postponed accordingly . . . take her off salary today.[127]

Then a miracle occurred—Miss Teasdale's raiment suddenly became effortless as a butterfly's wing! She was happy as a lark and wouldn't dream of leaving the *Dream!* For the next few weeks Verree had no more wardrobe complaints (and her gowns *were* massive battleships that must have been a nightmare to navigate in) but the fairy magic that upheld her bulky garments failed when the company adjourned to the Warner Ranch for the "triple wedding" sequence at the "Temple of Diana." The principal Athenians were all there augmented by 125 extras, 22 horses, 3 rams, and 2 bulls. As three camera crews covered the prodigious spectacle, whatever enchantment had sustained Verree's raiment for the past three weeks miscarried. But let us listen to the production report:

> Miss Teasdale ignored the call to put on her costume when needed, consequently delaying the company ten minutes, after which the scene was shot without her.[128]

By an uncanny coincidence, it was Miss Teasdale's last shot on the film.

January 19 found Jack Warner a relatively content studio mogul. At last, after a month of incoherent dailies, he could understand Anita Louise's diction. He was delighted by Fred Jackman's process shot of Titania's girls dancing on the treetops.

"We are definitely on the throes of making one of the most outstanding pictures ever produced," he beamed.[129]

MAD DOTAGE

As Wallis assessed what was needed to complete the *Dream,* he was shocked at how fully Blanke had lost his grasp of the production. Apart from Cagney's man-into-ass transformation, all of the Jackman shots still in progress were expendable or impractical, yet Blanke had not cancelled them. Miniature sets for a "faces in the forest" gag were all dressed up with no place to go. Components for an added scene of Oberon chasing fairies up a moonbeam wanted only the live plate of Victor Jory. Even though Wallis had ordered a halt to effects work on Puck's journey "round about the world" when Rooney was injured, Jackman had prepared Puck's slide down a redwood tree in the forest and miniature shots of him riding a branch. An invisibility gag involving Puck, and his miniaturization and subsequent leap to an outsized doorknob for the curtain speech had never been put on hold. The completed colossal door and doorknob had been built and were standing by, waiting for Mickey's splintered leg to mend.

Then there was the fish and pinecone. "Water tank is complete and today we are putting in a fish," reported Fred Jackman. "When he becomes accustomed to his new home and will eat food dropped in at the top, it will take but a few minutes to photograph."[130]

An exasperated Wallis wrote his line producer, requesting a reality check.

> I thought we had cut out the under-water shot of fish and pine cone . . . yet I see [Jackman] has built a water tank and it is like making an entire short subject to get this one shot—and I don't see why it couldn't have been cut out.[131]

February 6, 1935, with production scheduled to end in eight days, the unit was nowhere near finishing. Production manager William Koenig wrote to unit manager Al Alborn to make draconian cuts:

> To date, you have exceeded the budget over $30,000.00. Want everybody eliminated from the staff that you possibly can get along without as soon as you get out of the Palace . . . our staff is entirely too large and want to cut down on it . . . the picture is running entirely too high and we must finish it. Want to work day and night to clean it up. Make every minute count.[132]

Alas, Koenig was midwinter dreaming. Reinhardt's *Dream,* scheduled for forty-eight shooting days, would come in at seventy days and exceed budget by nearly 100 percent. Production would not close until March 12.

But that wouldn't end it—postproduction would provide ample opportunity for more folly, more wretched excess and more profligate spending.

In April 1935, Blanke wrote to Wallis for more information about a special promotional short intended to precede the "Wedding March" in the finished film:

> Has Mr. Warner made up his mind that we should engage Arturo Toscanini and photograph it in New York, or have Toscanini come out here to record and photograph the short, or has he dropped the Toscanini idea altogether, or is he going to do it with Korngold?[133]

What a moonstruck notion: a two-and-one-half-hour feature movie would stop the clock halfway through to present . . . the equivalent of a 1927 Vitaphone short? When

"Give us your hands": The cast commemorates the *finis* of Reinhardt's adventure in Tinseltown.

everyone sobered up, nothing more was said about this, but the time and money had already been spent for Anton Grot to design a set and draught elevations for constructing it.[134] Instead, in late June, a six-and-one-half-minute overture and three minutes of exit music were prepared by Leo Forbstein (Korngold had returned to Europe). A ten-minute interval was inserted after Titania's wedding to Bottom with an Intermission title inserted as Oberon rode off with the Indian Prince.

Reinhardt rode off to Leopoldskron, leaving the finishing to others. The size and shape of the picture waxed and waned. On April 1, Henry Blake apprised Wallis that

> Dieterle and [film editor] Ralph Dawson are still cutting down and improving upon the comedy of the last act . . . you and Mr. Warner can see the play by Tuesday afternoon, and by Wednesday night you will be able to look at the entire picture again. However, the nocturno will not be changed by then as it will take Ralph Dawson two or three more days to bring it back to its original length.[135]

The studio kept Reinhardt apprised of the cutting by cable, but the cuts were not deep. No American film in recent memory had come close to these proportions, and Warners had attempted nothing like it since *Noah's Ark* in 1929. Jack Warner was counting on the unprecedented performance length of 167 minutes to confer weight and "event status." The delusional excitement over the *Dream* and the genius of Reinhardt was palpable at the studio. Max Reinhardt was a keeper, and the studio exercised the first contract option for $150,000, giddily amending the agreement for five additional picture options. The second and third pictures would pay out at $150,000 each, the fourth at $175,000, and the fifth at a whopping $200,000.[136]

REMEMBER MY FORGOTTEN MAN

In May 1935, Hal Wallis and his wife, Louise Fazenda, went to Europe on a talent hunt and visited Reinhardt at Leopoldskron. There he encountered Reinhardt on his own turf, a relic of pre–World War I Vienna living as flamboyantly as a prince of the realm in his private dream world.

> We sat under thirty-foot ceilings on hand-embroidered chairs, discussing plans for the [next] production. There were several dining rooms, and we dined in a different one each night . . . The very large staff of servants wore period livery

> with white gloves. We felt we were taking part in an opera, or being entertained by royalty of the seventeenth or eighteenth century.[137]

Tales of Hoffmann was discussed as the first picture, but then *Danton* was put in preproduction (Reinhardt had staged Georg Buchner's play *Danton's Death* in New York in 1928). The Cosmopolitan Pictures unit, financed by William Randolph Hearst, requested Reinhardt start on Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* for the mistress of Hearst Castle, Marion Davies. One did not say "no" to Citizen Hearst, and Reinhardt was advanced another $25,000.[138]

Meanwhile, William Dieterle signed his new contract on July 9, 1935, for twenty-six weeks at $1750 per week. Now considered one of Warners' top directors, he started preproduction on a grand-scale costume melodrama, *Anthony Adverse,* from the sprawling (1,224 pages) bestselling 1933 novel by Hervey Allen. *Anthony Adverse* was as phenomenally popular at the time of its publication as *Gone with the Wind* would be several years later. It would be the studio's preeminent release of 1936.

Then in August, Jack Warner handed the production to Mervyn LeRoy. It was a family affair. LeRoy had just married Harry Warner's daughter, Doris, and *Anthony Adverse* was, candidly, a wedding present.

Dieterle cried foul. Citing "favoritism" he asked to be released from his contract. Warner promised Dieterle that he'd be given other big pictures to do, better pictures, perhaps *Robin Hood* or *Beethoven.* For the time being Dieterle calmed down, but he didn't like it.[139]

In early October, a week before the world premiere of *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* William Dieterle opened the trade papers and received another shock. Display ads placed by the studio gave Reinhardt sole directorial credit. Even more distressing were press releases that stated that Dieterle *assisted* Reinhardt. In a foul mood he wrote Jack Warner:

> I believe, Mr. Warner, that you know as well as I do, what I have done in bringing this picture to the screen. If you do not know or do not recall these facts, you might inquire of your writers as to who gave them the idea of the adaptation of the play; who conceived all of the ballets; who made the gorgeous photography possible . . . not one foot of the picture would have been produced had I not brought the idea of its production to you or had I not brought to you the services of Max Reinhardt . . . when I was required to give up "Anthony Adverse" for

> your family reasons, as you called it, you promised me I would not fear being the forgotten man of the 'Dream.'[140]

Jack Warner volleyed back, explaining that the solo use of the Reinhardt name was only for box-office value to protect an alleged investment of $1,800,000. Dieterle exploded: "You fear the use of my name will injure the returns!"[141]

> No one but myself brought you the idea and no one but myself brought Max Reinhardt to you . . . when your writers failed, I, myself, made the adaptation which was used in the production. I gave you more than normal services and cooperation when Mickey Rooney broke his leg . . . you and the studio feared that production would cease but I kept on without a minute's delay, inventing almost unbelievable tricks and devices.[142]

On October 9, 1935, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* had simultaneous transatlantic premieres in New York City and London. It would play as a reserved-seat Roadshow (two performances daily) in twenty-five North American cities and thirteen overseas venues.

The West Coast premiere on October 16, 1935, at Warner Bros.' Beverly Hills Theatre was a stellar affair. Reserved seats were five dollars apiece with admission granted only upon presentation of a die-cut parchment ticket, shaped like a key and bearing the hand-inked portraits of Will Shakespeare and Max Reinhardt. But a pall hung over the event, as Dieterle had gone public with his frustration. Just three days prior the *New York Times* had reported:

> William Dieterle is having difficulty retaining his identity as the director of the film with Warners emphasizing Max Reinhardt's connection with the piece. Dr. Reinhardt produced and Mr. Dieterle directed, but, as his name was absent from so much of the material issued by the studio, Mr. Dieterle bought a four-page advertisement in the trade papers to call attention to his work. Then some wag, who thought the joke was worth a substantial investment, bought a half-page ad that read, 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' by William Shakespeare (in collaboration). Courtesy of a friend."[143]

FIERCE VEXATIONS

Critics on both sides of the Atlantic strained to be polite. Over and over appear the words "heroic," "courageous," and that most unctuous euphemism "gorgeous photography" (already in 1935 it was code for "lousy movie"). The London critics carped most about textual cuts and the grating American accents. Predictably, the English tended to be protective of their heritage and intolerant of a colonial travesty. "It does not capture anything of the delicate phantasy of the play," reported Ernest Marshall from London:

> The magnificently achieved scenic effects are gross by contrast with the fairy visions called up in the mind by the poet's verse. Whether the group of star comedians who play Bottom and company do or do not clown exactly as Shakespeare would have had them do has been a point of much discussion, but on the whole the verdict of London would appear to be that their performances are more calculated to appeal to an average American audience than to an average English one.[144]

American critics felt intimidated by Shakespeare and inadequate in the presence of Art. Typical of these confused impulses was Andre Sennwald, the usually smart young film critic for the *New York Times,* who gave the picture a rave notice at its premiere on October 9. He forgave a multitude of sins and saw only the good:

> The work is rich in aspiration and the sum of its faults is dwarfed against the sheer bulk of the enterprise. The play has been adapted with intelligence and affection. Mickey Rooney's remarkable performance as Puck is one of the major delights of the work.[145]

Seventy-two hours later, Sennwald woke from his slumber, perhaps feeling like Bottom that he had been something of an ass. Under the heading "Morning after a Dream" (had Oberon streaked his eyes on opening night?) a sobered Sennwald voiced fierce vexations:

> [The movie] contains not one small loveliness that is not a thousand times more beautiful in the imagination after Shakespeare has kindled you with his glowing

> lines. The elaborate ballet is a tedious humbug and the dancing business on the double-exposure moonbeams is street-corner magic . . . Puck being yanked about the screen on wires is not quite the merry wanderer of the night that we know and love . . . I am afraid that we shall have to give "A Midsummer Night's Dream" back to the naked boards that originally cushioned it.[146]

That insouciant standard bearer of Manhattan's jaded gentry, *The New Yorker,* didn't even try to hide its ennui:

> For their purposes the Warners have not slighted Shakespeare. They have seen to it, or their director has, that no human being can leave the theater and whine afterward that he missed a pet line . . . Nor are the Mendelssohn Spring Song and Wedding March slighted in the presentation of the score. Culture groups will be happy as bees.[147]

Subsequent to the first run, the picture would play "the great elsewhere," and not at a performance time of two and one-half hours.[148] Just before Christmas, Reinhardt was informed—*after* the cuts had been made.

> My Dear Professor,
>
> Mr. Jack Warner left for New York a week ago and told me that he would look you up to tell you about the cuts we have made for the popular edition of the "Dream" (i.e. for the inexpensive bookings).
>
> The film as you have seen it at the premieres was 11,900 feet long. After the cuts the film is 10,400 feet long, and I believe we will have a film of generally greater appeal, as those shots which struck the audience as fatiguing have been eliminated entirely.[149]

By December 18, 1935, the exchanges were handling only the cut-down 117 minute version.[150] General release was in February 1936, and the picture would continue to spiral out to small towns well into April 1937.

It was nominated for two Academy Awards in the categories of Film Editing and Outstanding Production. Ralph Dawson won for Film Editing but *Mutiny on the Bounty* took the big prize. The picture did receive a second Oscar for Best Cinematography due to a write-in ballot for cameraman Hal Mohr. Another *Dream* write-in ballot for assistant director Sherry Shourds was not successful.[151]

In the play's famous curtain speech, Puck apologizes to the audience for the foregoing antics and asks the audience's indulgence. Puck did well to beg forgiveness from the small town exhibitor, and it wasn't forthcoming. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was a picture for city slickers. It was a dead dog with the hicks in the sticks, according to exhibitor reports.

> A better name for this picture with my patrons would be Midwinter Night-mare. This picture may have gone over big in some places, but this happens to be not one of the places. Walking out happened. Country exhibitors better skip it. B. L. Hawkins, Hawkins Theatre, Newellton, Louisiana. Village and rural patronage.[152]

> Can't express it. Will just say being a jackass lowered James Cagney's Prestige here. M. Ewing Amus, U Theatre, La Harpe, Ill. Small town patronage.[153]

> Truly a gigantic, stupendous, colossal, tremendous flop! Despite the casting of practically all of Warners' 1935 talent list, despite adequate promotion by this theatre, despite good weather and supposedly improving business conditions, this picture grossed barely more than film rental. When will producers, so imbued with their personal desires to create artistic triumphs and thus become the envy of their fellow-producers, learn that the general movie-going audiences wants merely to be entertained . . . Harold Bernstein, Plaza Theatre, Norwood, Ohio. General patronage.[154]

> Never again will I play a picture on terms I played this on. Lost money. No business, no good comments. Sammie Jackson, Jackson Theatre, Flomaton, Ala. General patronage.[155]

> This and *Anthony Adverse* in the same week about put me in the breadline. Gladys E. McArdle, Owl Theatre, Lebannon, Kansas. Small town patronage.[156]

The legend has grown that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was a fiasco that failed to earn back its cost.[157] To the contrary, it actually performed extremely well, grossing $710,000 in America alone (the studio's routine releases in this period grossed between $300,000 and $600,000 domestically). It was Warner Bros.' sixth-top-grossing picture for the 1935–36 fiscal year from a roster of fifty-eight releases. When foreign returns of

$498,000 were counted, the total gross was over $1.2 million, with income exceeding the negative cost of $981,000 by at least 30 percent.[158] Marketing and distribution costs likely offset any profit, but people went to see it. It filled more seats than the average Warner film, but the cost-to-profit ratio was lopsided. It had just cost too much to make.[159]

A Midsummer Night's Dream achieved what the studio most desired: it gave them prestige and took them "out of the shirt sleeve class."[160] Now, when MGM released Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* for the 1936 season, Louis B. Mayer was simply following Jack Warner's lead.

If Reinhardt felt ill-used, it had been no less an ordeal for the movie people. New York columnist Inez Wallace phoned long distance to Warner Bros.' Burbank studio and got Eddie Selzer, head of publicity, on the line. Selzer was in a foul mood. Max Reinhardt was a madman; he kept asking for the impossible—fairies, dew drops, moonbeams. "Believe me, sister," moaned Selzer,

> you got out of Hollywood just in time. The producers may call this Shakespeare story a dream but it's been a nightmare to the staff at our studio. We lived through it, but most of us are just one step removed from the insane asylum . . . I'm on my way to the sanitarium for a rest cure."[161]

It was no secret in Hollywood that Max Reinhardt was quixotic and fickle to work with. One journalist who visited the set saw firsthand how he demanded set changes after construction. "It is known, however, that bit by bit, a pillar here, a fifteen foot extension there, Dr. Reinhardt got what he wanted from the astonished producers. The doctor's relations with the [Warner] Brothers are somewhat comparable to the popular conception of how Grant took Richmond."[162]

Reinhardt's son, Gottfried, referred to the aftermath of "the promising *Midsummer* honeymoon" as "a barren autumnal marriage and, finally, a hibernal divorce."[163] This is an unfair and partisan statement. Warners tried to maintain Max as a movie mogul. Relentlessly for the next three years they tried to squeeze a movie out of him, but he dismissed or denigrated everything from *Danton* to *Die Fledermas* and *The Green Pastures.* One of his goofiest suggestions was *Faust,* promising the "Clash of the Accents" with Wisconsin-born Fredric March as Goethe's Germanic hero, Swedish Greta Garbo as Marguerite, and the Magyar Béla Lugosi (Dracula himself) as Mephistopheles.[164]

Finally on March 28, 1938, Jack Warner canceled Reinhardt's contract and allocated costs for *Twelfth Night,* the vanity production insisted on by William Randolph Hearst for Marion Davies. It had proven "impossible to develop," he noted.

> We fared no better with other properties (i.e. DANTON, THE GAMBLERS). $150,000 has been paid to Reinhardt on these unproduced projects and money is to be charged to Cosmopolitan through twelve old Cosmopolitan pictures made under the 10/31/34 contract.[165]

After three-and-a-half years, one movie, and $275,000 paid to the good Doktor, the great Reinhardt experiment was concluded. The bill was laid on the doorstep at San Simeon and the studio books were closed. Max Reinhardt's hibernal divorce from Hollywood had begun.

OFFENDING SHADOWS

With *A Midsummer Night's Dream* the Warner Bros. had demonstrated that they were capable of more than bullets and ballots, boy crooners and love-sick stenographers. If the way was paved for elaborate pictures to head Warners' product line, they would at least be "movie movies" that audiences would want to see: biographies (*The Story of Louis Pasteur*), boys' adventure fiction with Errol Flynn (*The Adventures of Robin Hood*), and adaptations of recent stage hits (*The Green Pastures*).

In *The Genius,* Gottfried Reinhardt's four-hundred-page memoir of his father, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is conspicuous for the short shrift it is given. As a movie man himself, Gottfried understood the politics of grabbing full credit for success and distancing oneself from any whiff of failure. He dismisses the movie as suffering from delegation of authority and cursory Reinhardt involvement. He terms his father's partnership with Dieterle "cordial but not congenial." "Papa," he claims, was a captive of his codirector, and a captive of the studio bosses who saddled Reinhardt with second-rate actors who were refugees from "gangster films, musicals, and low comedies." He balks at the one enduring thing about the film, its visual style, deeming it kitsch. Like some disingenuous ventriloquist's dummy yammering on behalf of his Papa from beyond the veil, he disallows in absentia the paterfamilias stamp of approval:

> My father would never have stood for Dieterle's optical effects in the theatre. He stood for them on the screen because he saw them for the first time only after the picture was completed.[166]

For Gottfried's part, it would seem that as long as there was glory to be had, it was Max's movie. But once the raspberries were given and the red ink flowed, the

Reinhardt clan blamed the entire benighted enterprise on that former pupil Dieterle and those low American movie actors.

For his part, Dieterle held his mentor in the highest regard for the rest of his days and looked back fondly on their collaboration at Burbank. "It was a nice, sweet marriage—we worked well together,"[167] he told Tom Flinn in 1972, sitting in his modest study in Munich with its "wood-panelled protestant simplicity, broken only by shelves of books and a single picture—a framed photograph of Max Reinhardt."[168]

The irony is, of course, that Reinhardt's predominant reputation now and for all time will rest with this film. Rinehardt's theatrical achievements are the dry bones of history. *Everyman* and *The Miracle* were electric points of living theatre, unfixed moments now lost in time, and so relegated to the transience of memory and the dustbins of theatrical arcana. Those silent movies from the 'teens don't fare much better, extant today but no one will look at them, so awkward and primitive that even Reinhardt disowned them. Equitably or not, the 1935 film of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* will be forever bound up with Reinhardt's name and remain the sole touchstone of his art, the single apologia of his reputation.

Reinhardt in Hollywood had been a noble experiment that would not be repeated. As an English critic sagely observed following the London opening,

> If they had saved some of their money and trusted Shakespeare a little more they would have made a better film. It is a ludicrous producer's-dream-come-true. I have never seen more clearly demonstrated the danger of giving an enthusiastic and imaginative producer his head. Shakespeare's text is cut to the bone, thrown away for the sake of the decoration which is put over with true Teutonic ruthlessness. There were moments when I was reminded of the little girl who said, 'Mummy, it was a lovely party. I was sick *five times!*'[169]

A lovely party: First night in the hills of Beverly.

NOTES

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The research materials and citations gathered for this article are on deposit at The Harold B. Lee Library, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah. All illustrations are from the author's collection.

1. Andre Sennwald, "Warner Brothers Present the Max Reinhardt Film of 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' at the Hollywood," *New York Times,* October 10, 1935.

2. Along with *The Tempest* and *Love's Labour Lost, A Midsummer Night's Dream* is one of Shakespeare's few plays with no known antecedent. There is precedent for the "play-within-the-play," the tale of *Pyramus and Thisbe,* a Babylonian story that is told by the first-century poet Ovid in *Metamorphoses.* It is also considered to be Shakespeare's root source for *Romeo and Juliet.*

3. Alexander Woollcott, "Max the Magnificent," *The New Yorker,* June 21, 1930.

4. Lincoln Eyre, "Salzburg Festival Draws Stage Fans," *New York Times,* August 19, 1928.

5. "Reinhardt's Attitude toward the Films," *New York Times,* September 4, 1927.

6. The pictures are *Sumurûn* (1910), *Das Mirakel* (1912), *Die Insel der Seligen* (1913), and *Venezianische Nachts* (1914).

7. Scott Eyman, *Ernst Lubitsch* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 38.

8. Gottfried Reinhardt, *The Genius—A Memoir of Max Reinhardt by His Son Gottfried Reinhardt* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979), 287.

9. "Reinhardt Planning Busy American Visit," *New York Times,* November 9, 1928

10. "Max Reinhardt Here; Hostile to 'Talkies,'" *New York Times,* December 25, 1928.

11. "Murnau Gives Views of Film Art vs. Stage," *The Washington Post,* January 6, 1929.

12. Reinhardt, *The Genius,* 297.

13. A good indication of Reinhardt's self-absorption was his blithe approach to casting. Before arriving in Los Angeles, Max casually wired son Gottfried

to secure the players: Chaplin (Bottom), Garbo (Titania), Clark Gable (Demetrius), Gary Cooper (Lysander), John Barrymore (Oberon), W. C. Fields (Thisbe), Wallace Beery ("Lion"), Walter Huston (Theseus), Joan Crawford (Hermia), Myrna Loy (Helena), Fred Astaire (Puck). See Reinhardt, *The Genius*, 297.

14. Mickey Rooney, *Life Is Too Short* (New York: Villard Books, 1991), 61–62.

15. Miss de Havilland recalls this somewhat differently today, maintaining that she was always first understudy. Jean Rouverol never figures in her narrative. See "Interview: Olivia de Havilland, Leading Lady," October 5, 2006, *Academy of Achievement*, http://www.achievement.org/autodoc/page/deh0int-8.

16. De Havilland, "Interview."

17. Tom Flinn, "William Dieterle: The Plutarch of Hollywood," *The Velvet Light Trap* 15 (Autumn 1975): 26.

18. Hal Wallis and Charles Higham, *Starmaker: The Autobiography of Hal Wallis* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1980), 40.

19. The others were actors Anton Pointer, Lissy Arna, and Carla Bartheel. Dieterle directed Pointer in Warners' German version of *Kismet* (1930), and all four would be directed by Michael Curtiz in *Dämon des Meeres*, the German version of *Moby Dick*. The others returned to Germany when Warners disbanded foreign talkies in 1931.

20. Flinn, "William Dieterle," 26.

21. "Wife of Director Inspired 'Midsummer Night's Dream,'" *Los Angeles Times*, September 15, 1935.

22. *New York Times*, October 20, 1935, clipping, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* publicity file, The Warner Bros. Archives, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, Calif. Reference to these archives are hereafter shortened to the relevant "*Dream* file, USC."

23. Payroll sheets show Reinhardt ultimately received a total of $104,000 for his time on the *Dream*. Thimig collected all of her $25,000 between September 29 and December 1. Her name never appears on production reports, but she stuck close to Reinhardt on the set and appears among the crew in numerous set stills. Thimig would also pocket a cool $50,000 as Reinhardt's assistant on the unproduced *Danton*. Following Reinhardt's death in 1943, Thimig took small acting roles in films; she is best remembered as creepy Madame Kyra, a superstitious Greek peasant, in Val Lewton's *Isle of the Dead* (1945).

24. Flinn, "William Dieterle," 26.

25. Max Reinhardt contract for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, October 23, 1934, *Dream* Reinhardt contract file, USC.

26. Reinhardt, *The Genius*, 305–6. Teenaged Gottfried Reinhardt had been employed in Hollywood, without salary, by his father's acolyte, Ernst Lubitsch. He parlayed this experience into being hired as a production assistant at MGM in 1931, when he was eighteen. Nine years later, not yet thirty, he was producing *Comrade X* with Clark Gable and *Two-Faced Woman* with Greta Garbo, and was still complaining about Hollywood. His most notable production was an extremely troubled one, *The Red Badge of Courage* (1951).

27. Wallis to Henry Blanke, undated draft memo, *Dream* production file, USC.
28. Draft telegram to Irving Asher, undated, *Dream* production file, USC.
29. *A Midsummer Nights* (sic) *Dream*, screenplay, undated photocopy, author's collection.
30. Schlesinger, head of Warner Bros.' cartoon department, also owned Pacific Title, an independent title studio in Hollywood. The final titles were done at the studio by Fred Jackman's department. The final design is elegant, rippling on and off like gossamer against an art background of a crescent moon in a star-spangled sky. The effect was achieved by placing the hand-lettered title element in a trough of still water. A high-speed camera would be engaged and the water would be agitated, giving the letter-forms as refracted through the water the appearance of rippling. These title overlays would be optically printed to the background plate with timed lap dissolves. The same technique over a live-action production plate was used for the INTERMISSION card.
31. Dieterle to Jack L. Warner, letter, October 1935, Dieterle contract file, USC.
32. Mary McCall Jr. to Blanke, interoffice communication, October 24, 1934, *Dream* production file, USC.
33. McCall Jr. to Blanke, informal interoffice communication, undated, circa November 1934, *Dream* production file, USC.
34. Blanke had been an assistant to Ernst Lubitsch, who was another Reinhardt protégé from the old country. He supervised Warner foreign versions before being moved in 1932 to mainline product like *Mystery of the Wax Museum.* He survived his time with Reinhardt and went on to produce many of the greatest Warner Bros. films, including *The Adventures of Robin Hood, The Sea Hawk, The Maltese Falcon,* and *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre.*
35. Joe Adamson, *Byron Haskin Interviewed by Joe Adamson* (Metuchen, N.J.: The Directors Guild of America and The Scarecrow Press, 1984), 117.
36. Draft telegram to Irving Asher, undated, *Dream* production file, USC.
37. MGM had better luck than Reinhardt and secured Messel for sets and costumes on *Romeo and Juliet* (1936). Messel was primarily a stage and ballet designer. Among his other occasional films are *The Thief of Bagdad* (1940) and *The Queen of Spades* (1948).
38. George Shaffer, "Create Forest Indoors to Film Reinhardt Show," *Chicago Daily Tribune,* January 29, 1935. In two instances, the camera actually crosses the demarcation from the stage forest and dollies out onto the outdoor trestle, once during the "Scherzo" and again when Bottom leaves the forest the morning after the dream.
39. A. Ronald Button to Roy Obringer, telegram, November 23, 1934, *Dream* legal file, Warner Bros. Collection, USC. During the Chicago run of the play, Reinhardt himself had told de Havilland's agent that the studio had chosen Bette Davis.
40. Olivia de Havilland to Messrs. Warner Pictures Inc., letter, December 3, 1934, *Dream* legal file, Warner Bros. Collection, USC.
41. Hal Wallis became annoyed when the executed contract was shown him,

as it specified a November 15 start date when Rooney wasn't needed until December 1. *Dream*, contract files, USC.

42. Mae Tinée, "Photography Is Chief Virtue of Reinhardt Film," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, November 27, 1935.

43. Although he disappointed Joe E. Brown by not appearing in the *Dream*, Bill Shakespeare would make his only movie the following year, playing himself in RKO Radio Pictures' football melodrama *The Big Game* (1936).

44. Joe E. Brown as told to Ralph Hancock, *Laughter Is a Wonderful Thing* (New York: A. S. Barnes and Company, 1956), 208–9.

45. Ibid.

46. Robinson would become a Dieterle favorite, appearing in *Scarlet Dawn*, *Grand Slam*, *Juarez*, and *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*.

47. Although Olivia de Havilland's parents were British, she was born in Tokyo and at the age of three was moved by her mother to California when her parents divorced. She had a strictly American upbringing.

48. Robert A. Haller, "Kenneth Anger," Harvard Independent Film Group, Interclub Screening, June 14, 1980.

49. Verified specimens of Reinhardt's handwriting in the Warner Bros. files are all pretentiously crafted and fussily rendered in violet ink with a calligraphic pen, utterly unlike the spontaneous German casting notes for the *Dream*. The notes are therefore presumed to be in Dieterle's workaday hand.

50. Silly press releases would later claim that Reinhardt never entertained the traditional idea of Bottom as a fat weaver and screened old movies for three days to find his man, choosing Cagney after randomly screening *Lady Killer*. See Sid, "The Hollywood Lowdown," press release, *Dream* publicity file, USC.

51. Wallis to Blanke, interoffice communication, October 24, 1934, *Dream* production file, USC.

52. Doug Warren with James Cagney, *James Cagney: The Authorized Biography* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983), 110.

53. Andre Sennwald, "Warner Brothers Present the Max Reinhardt Film of 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' at the Hollywood," *New York Times*, October 10, 1935.

54. *Sunday Graphic*, London, undated clipping, *Dream* publicity file, USC. Some perceived insults are never forgotten. England's most scathing and public critique festered a full decade before being delivered. There is a sequence in Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger's wartime meditation on Anglo-American relations, *A Matter of Life and Death* (1946), where American soldiers, billeted in a English manor house, rehearse an amateur production of the *Dream*. Not only do the Yanks misspell Shakespeare's name on their poster, but Bottom is assayed by an Irish-American soldier named "Logan" who brays in a frightful New York accent. "No, no!" cries the director, the local Vicar, "Bottom is not a gangster!"

55. James Cagney, *Cagney by Cagney* (Doubleday, New York 1976).

56. Doug Warren with James Cagney, *James Cagney: The Authorized Biography* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983), 110.

57. D.W.C. [Douglas W. Churchill], "The Solid Fabric of a Midsummer's Dream," *New York Times*, October 20, 1935.

58. Douglas W. Churchill, "Hollywood on the Wire," *New York Times*, January 26, 1936.

59. Edwin Schallert, "Good Old Bard Shakespeare Gets Another Jolt; Mrs. Bottom in 'Dream,'" *Los Angeles Times,* January 7, 1935.
60. Bottom's wife would make her belated debut, personified by Heather Parisi, in Michael Hoffman's 1999 film of the play.
61. Blanke to Irving Pichel, letter, November 24, 1934, *Dream* production file, USC.
62. Wallis to Blanke, interoffice communication, December 5, 1934, *Dream* production file, USC.
63. Leith Adams, "Fire at Warner Bros, Studios, 1934," *WB Highlights,* November/December 1993, 3.
64. "Films Go On Despite Fire," *Los Angeles Times,* December 6, 1934.
65. As studio fire chief, sixty-five-year-old Rounder's main function was to oversee controlled fire scenes being taken on the lot and ensure that they were executed safely. It was never anticipated that a man of his years would be required to serve in such an unscripted emergency.
66. "One Dead And Seven Hurt Fighting . . .," *Glendale News Press,* December 5, 1934.
67. *Los Angeles Times,* December 6, 1934.
68. Leith Adams, *WB Highlights,* November/December 1993.
69. "Films Valued as Historical Lost," *Glendale News Press,* December 5, 1934.
70. *The Los Angeles Times,* December 6, 1934.
71. Koenig to Wallis, interoffice communication, December 11, 1934, *Dream* production file, USC.
72. "New Opera Form Created in Films," *New York Times,* May 12, 1935.
73. Erich Wolfgang Korngold, article in *Music and Dance in California,* June 1940, cited in Brendan G. Carroll, *Erich Wolfgang Korngold—The Maestro of Hollywood (2007),* http://www.korngold-society.org/midsummer.pdf.
74. *Guide Book to the Dorr Historical Collection of Motion Picture Choral Recordings, Musical Scores, Still Pictures, and Tapes, Made by Saint Luke's Choristers,* in *Dream* production file, USC.
75. Victor Jory, interview with Brendan G. Carroll, September 5, 1975.
76. Brendan G. Carroll, *The Last Prodigy: A Biography of Erich Wolfgang Korngold* (Portland, Ore.: Amadeus Press, 1997), 237.
77. Ultimately, Korngold's value would be recognized by the studio, and he would be warmly invited back, first to score *Captain Blood,* then *Anthony Adverse,* for which he won an Oscar. Like Reinhardt, Korngold was a Jew with strong ties to Viennese life. In 1938, Korngold resisted Warners' entreaties to score *The Adventures of Robin Hood,* but his grudging acceptance of the commission not only resulted in one of the most beloved scores of all time but effectively saved his life by placing him in Hollywood just as Hitler annexed Austria.
78. J. L. Warner to Blanke, interoffice communication, December 11, 1934, *Dream* production file, USC. Although Leo Forbstein would receive screen credit for conducting the Vitaphone Orchestra, Brendan Carroll states that Korngold conducted the final scoring. See Carroll, *The Last Prodigy,* 243.
79. Wallis to Blanke and Koenig, interoffice communication, December 17, 1934, *Dream* production file, USC.
80. Ibid.

81. Ibid.
82. Wallis and Higham, *Starmaker,* 42.
83. Wallis to Dieterle, interoffice communication, December 20, 1934, *Dream* production file, USC.
84. In later years, Dieterle would be disingenuous in discussing Haller's dismissal. He told Tom Flinn, "At first Ernie Haller was the cameraman, but he was too much a ladies' photographer. He couldn't get the right mood, and we were lucky enough to find an outside man, Hal Mohr, who did a great job." See Flinn, "William Dieterle," 26.
85. George C. Pratt, "Camera on the Move: An Interview with Hal Mohr," *Image* 19, no. 1 (1976): 25.
86. Shaffer, *Chicago Daily Tribune,* January 29, 1935.
87. J. L. Warner to Blanke, interoffice communication, December 27, 1934, *Dream* production file, USC.
88. Adamson, *Byron Haskin,* 118–19.
89. William French, "A Dream Comes True," *Modern Screen,* June 1935, 108
90. Warren with Cagney, *James Cagney,* 110.
91. William McPeak, "Biography for Max Reinhardt," http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0718121/bio.
92. Mickey Rooney to author, North Hollywood, California, 1998.
93. Flinn, "William Dieterle," 26.
94. Wallis to Dieterle and Blanke, interoffice communication, December 31, 1934, *Dream* production file, USC.
95. French, "A Dream Comes True," 108
96. Ibid.
97. Wallis to Blanke, interoffice communication, December 27, 1934, *Dream* production file, USC.
98. Margaret Kerry is best known as the live-action model for Tinker Bell in Disney's animated version of *Peter Pan* (1953). She had been adopted by a woman named Mrs. Robb, a classic Hollywood stage mother. At four years old she considered herself "Peggy Robb." The "Peggy Robbins" listed among the fifty-six Ballet Girls on the studio cast sheet for the *Dream* is likely a corruption of this. To add to the confusion, during fitting, as the wardrobe mistress prepared to write the child's name in her costume, Mrs. Robb suddenly announced that the girl was "Peggy Lynch."
99. Margaret Kerry, interview with the author, January 29, 2009.
100. Inez Wallace, "Warner Spectacle Took 85 Miles of Film," 20 October 1935, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* publicity file, USC.
101. One person to whom Anger breathlessly relayed the tale was memorabilia dealer Phil Edwards. In the 1970s, Edwards was working for The Cinema Bookshop in Great Russell Street, London. The shop got in a tobacco tin and an ex-libris bookplate reputedly from Valentino's estate. In a January 29, 2009, e-mail message to the author, Edwards recalled, "We knew Anger, a well-known Valentino collector, was in town working on *Lucifer Rising,* so I called him. He said to bring the Valentino items around to his editing suite off Wardour Street. There were black drapes around the back of a Steenbeck and a small crucifix hanging upside down above it. While Anger was looking at items, we got into a general discussion about *Hollywood Babylon,* during

which he told me that he had been in the *Dream* as—whatever role he claims it was—a fairy. He told me there had been a terrible accident on the set, during which some small, very small children or babies who had cellophane wings attached to appear as small fairies/cherubs, were rotating around on a rig and the cellophane wings caught fire causing some to be badly burnt. I'd never heard this, and was suitably horrified."

102. No mention of this appears in the Daily Production and Progress Report, but head of publicity Eddie Selzer reported the bear's death to columnist Inez Wallace in a telephone interview just before the opening, claiming "we still don't know why it died." See Wallace, "Warner Spectacle Took 85 Miles of Film," clipping in *Dream* publicity file, USC.

103. J. L. Warner to Wallis, interoffice communication, January 19, 1935, *Dream* production file, USC. Writer Mark McGee claims the film had blue-tinted sequences. The 35mm nitrate studio print held at the UCLA Film & Television Archives is strictly black-and-white, but it is the short Popular Edition. If the color effect was used in the Roadshow edition, it is not remarked on by any of the October reviews or trade papers. See Mark McGee, *Beyond Ballyhoo: Motion Picture Promotion and Gimmicks* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland and Company, 1989), 14.

104. Screenplay, *A Midsummer Nights Dream* [sic], undated photocopy, author's collection, page 81.

105. "Nocturno," two-page treatment, undated, *Dream* production file, USC.

106. Wallis to Blanke, interoffice communication, December 31, 1934, *Dream* production file, USC.

107. Wallis to Blanke, interoffice communication, December 29, 1934, *Dream* production file, USC.

108. Isabel Morse Jones, "Camera Angles Supersede Music, Art, Nijinska Finds," *Los Angeles Times*, January 20, 1935.

109. Wallis to Dieterle and Blanke, inter-office communication, 31 December 1934, *Dream* production file, Warner Bros. Collection, USC.

110. Wallis to Dieterle and Blanke, interoffice communication, December 31, 1934.

111. Wallis to Dieterle and Blanke, interoffice communication, December 31, 1934.

112. Wallis to Dieterle and Blanke, interoffice communication, December 31, 1934.

113. Interoffice communication, January 4, 1935, *Dream* production file, USC.

114. Wallis to Dieterle, copy to Mr. Koenig and Mr. Blanke, interoffice communication, January 3, 1935, *Dream* production file, USC.

115. Wallis to Dieterle, interoffice communication, January 7, 1935, *Dream* production file, USC.

116. Wallis to Mohr, interoffice communication, January 7, 1935, *Dream* production file, USC.

117. Wallis to Dieterle, interoffice communication, January 7, 1935, *Dream* production file, USC.

118. Mickey Rooney, *Life Is Too Short* (New York, Villard Books, 1991), 67.

119. Breakston usually played maudlin waifs in 1930s movies. He's the mostly

sickly Wiggs child in *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch*; the kid on the bus with the sick mother in *It Happened One Night*; the kid with the dead dog in *Life Returns*. His trademark, three-hanky death scenes occur in *No Greater Glory* (1934) and *The Return of Peter Grimm* (1935). Mickey Rooney bonded with him, and Breakston would follow him to MGM, portraying "Beezy" in the *Andy Hardy* series that Rooney headlined. After World War II, Breakston became an independent film producer based in Africa and Asia. He is best remembered as the *auteur* of a grim horror picture filmed in Japan. He wrote and directed *The Manster* (1959), a Freudian ink blot concerning an American journalist posted to Tokyo who is unwittingly injected with mutant enzymes by an arrogant and self-important "foreigner," Dr. Suzuki. A hideous doppelganger head sprouts from his shoulder and, ultimately, the evil twin emerges as a free entity. Talk about changelings! You have to wonder what kind of pubescent identity crisis Breakston was processing if *The Manster* was his delayed psychological reaction to being Mickey Rooney's teenage double for that other self-important foreign diplomate, Dr. Reinhardt. Breakston died in 1973.

120. It was clear that *Dinky*'s schedule overlapped the *Dream* and that Reinhardt would never tolerate his Puck working on another movie. Breakston's mother raised a fuss about this later, and Warners' outside counsel, Frenton and Files, reviewed the situation and opined that the *Dinky* offer had been a bribe and that there seemed to be "a reasonable inference that the studio never did have any intention of putting Breakston in *Dinky*. See Ralph Lewis to Obringer, letter, July 7, 1935, *Dream* legal file, USC.

121. D. W. C. [Douglas W. Churchill], "The Solid Fabric of a Midsummer's Dream," *New York Times*, October 20, 1935.

122. Wallis to Messrs. Dieterle, Blanke & Logan, cc: Mr. Koenig, interoffice communication, January 16, 1935, *Dream* production file, USC.

123. Wallis to Dieterle and Blanke, interoffice communication, January 16, 1935, *Dream* production file, USC.

124. Nathan Levinson to Wallis, cc: Blanke, Dieterle, Groves, Forrest, interoffice communication, January 16, 1935, *Dream* production file, USC.

125. Levinson to Wallis, January 16, 1935, USC.

126. Jack L.Warner to Blanke, interoffice communication, January 22, 1935, *Dream* production file, USC.

127. Wallis to Koenig, copy to Obringer and Blanke, interoffice communication, January 21, 1935, *Dream* production file, USC.

128. Daily Production and Progress Report, February 16, 1935, *Dream* production file, USC.

129. Jack L.Warner to Reinhardt, Dieterle, and Blanke, interoffice communication, January 19, 1935, *Dream* production file, USC.

130. Fred Jackman to Koenig, interoffice communication, February 7, 1935, *Dream* production file, USC.

131. Wallis to Blanke, interoffice communication, February 15, 1935, *Dream* production file, USC.

132. Koenig to Al Alborn, interoffice communication, February 6, 1935, *Dream* production file, USC.

133. Blanke to Wallis, interoffice communication, April 1, 1935, *Dream* contract file, USC.

134. A one-reel promotional trailer entitled *A Dream Comes True* was made from snippets, off-set shots, and premiere newsreels and given out to exchanges as if it were a short subject. The principal actors appeared in sixty-second teaser trailers where, discovered standing before a curtain, they urged patrons to queue up for *A Midsummer Night's Dream.* These teasers were spliced on to the head of other Warner movies; under no circumstances, advised the exchange, were these to be removed. As he was a subject of the Empire and the only actor in the cast to have ever made films in England, Ian Hunter's teaser was spliced to the head of the London premiere print as an audience warmer.

135. Blanke to Wallis, interoffice communication, April 1, 1935, *Dream* contract file, USC.

136. Memo, December 15, 1936, Max Reinhardt contract file, USC.

137. Wallis and Higham, *Starmaker,* 41.

138. William Randolph Hearst financed the Cosmopolitan shingle at Warners primarily to promote Miss Davies' waning career.

139. Dieterle to Jack L. Warner, letter, August 11, 1935, Dieterle contract file, USC.

140. Dieterle to Jack L. Warner, letter, October 3, 1935, Dieterle contract file, USC.

141. Dieterle to Jack L. Warner, letter, October 4, 1935, Dieterle contract file, USC.

142. Dieterle to Jack L. Warner, letter, October 10, 1935, Dieterle contract file, USC. Whether due to these claims or not, Dieterle would flourish at the studio for the rest of the decade, directing 1937's Best Picture Academy Award winner *The Life of Emile Zola.*

143. Douglas W. Churchill, "News and Gossip from the Gold Coast," *New York Times,* October 13, 1935.

144. Ernest Marshall, clipping, *Dream* publicity file, USC.

145. Andre Sennwald, "Warner Brothers Present the Max Reinhardt Film of 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' at the Hollywood," *New York Times,* October 10, 1935.

146. Andre Sennwald, "Morning after a Dream," *New York Times,* October 13, 1935.

147. "The Warner Brothers' Dream," *The New Yorker,* October 19, 1935, 83.

148. From "House Lights Down" to "Last Note of Music Rings Out," the Roadshow edition of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* occupies nearly 167 minutes in performance. This comprises: Overture, 6:30; Part One picture time, 70:00; Intermission, 10:00; Part Two picture time, 77:00; and Exit Music, 3:00.

149. Blanke to Reinhardt, interoffice communication, December 23, 1935, *Dream* production file, USC.

150. The Library of Congress holds the full Roadshow version as a fifteen-reel composite dupe negative, Reels 1–14 in nitrate, Reel 15 in a 1952 acetate copy. The Overture, Intermission, and Exit are included. The original cut camera negative edited down to the Popular Edition is also held in twelve reels. Though it omits the MPPA certificate before the Main Title, the 2007 Warner Home Video DVD is otherwise the opening night Roadshow version.

151. Write-in ballots had only been permitted the previous year following complaints that Bette Davis and Myrna Loy had not been nominated for their respective roles in *Of Human Bondage* and *The Thin Man.* In 1935, other Warner Bros. productions also received write-in ballots: *Captain Blood* for director Michael Curtiz and writer Casey Robinson, and *Black Fury* for actor Paul Muni. Following Hal Mohr's upset win for the *Dream,* AMPAS disallowed the procedure.

152. *Motion Picture Herald,* "What the Picture Did for Me," April 10, 1937.

153. *Motion Picture Herald,* "What the Picture Did for Me," December 5, 1936.

154. *Motion Picture Herald,* "What the Picture Did for Me," January 2, 1937.

155. *Motion Picture Herald,* "What the Picture Did for Me," August 15, 1936.

156. *Motion Picture Herald,* "What the Picture Did for Me," January 30, 1937.

157. The alleged financial failure of the film is repeated in virtually every précis of the film, along with the other usual canards (Kenneth Anger's alleged participation; the film a critical flop): "*A Midsummer Night's Dream* was a critical and box office flop" ("Imaginary Creatures," *Classic Film Preview,* Oct 27, 2007, http://www.classicfilmpreview.com/imaginary-creatures/), ". . . after its failure at the box-office nothing came of [Reinhardt's] plans" ("Shakespeare, Films, and the Marketplace," session 2: "Shakespeare in the Entertainment Industry," Cambridge University Press Web site, http://www.fathom.com/course/21701731/session2.html), "Its box-office failure spelled the end of his association with Hollywood" (Frank Miller, "James Cagney: Star of the Month," Turner Classic Movies Web site, http://www.tcm.com/thismonth/article.jsp?cid=25790&mainArticleId=184891).

158. In his exchange of letters with Dieterle in October 1935 over the matter of directorial credit, Jack Warner mentions the cost of the *Dream* as $1.8 million. This is roughly twice the negative cost carried on the studio's books and may reflect marketing and print costs. J. E. Sewell in the London *Daily Telegram* also mentions a production cost of $1.75 million. This would seem to be the "official" price the studio chose to disseminate.

159. "Warner Bros. Pictures, Inc., Comparison of Negative Costs and Gross Income of 1935–36 Productions to August 31, 1944," William Schaefer Collection, USC Cinema-Television Library, University of Southern California, Los Angeles. *The Charge of the Light Brigade* was the top grosser at $2.7 million, but it also cost the most to make at just over $1 million, but its Return on Investment (ROI) was 270 percent. The other top pictures were *Shipmates Forever* (gross $1.5 million, cost $508 thousand, ROI 295 percent), *Ceiling Zero* (gross $1.3 million, cost $448 thousand, ROI 290 percent), The *White Angel* (gross $1.4 million, cost $506 thousand, ROI 277 percent), *Frisco Kid* (gross $1.1 million, cost $610 thousand, ROI 180 percent). With a $1.2 million gross, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* ROI was only 123 percent, respectable but not sensational.

160. *New York Times,* clipping, *Dream* publicity file, USC.

161. Inez Wallace, "Warner Spectacle Took 85 Miles of Film," October 20, 1935, *Dream* publicity file, USC.

162. D. W. C., dateline Hollywood, clipping, *Dream* publicity file, USC.
163. Reinhardt, *The Genius,* 292.
164. "Reinhardt Set on Making 'Faust' at WB, Garbo Lead?" *Variety,* September 3, 1935. In August 1938, Reinhardt would stage *Faust* with Conrad Nagel at the Pilgrimage Theater in Hollywood's Cahuenga Pass (today, the John Anson Ford Amphitheater).
165. J. L. Warner to S. Carlisle, interoffice communication, March 28, 1938, Max Reinhardt contract file, USC.
166. Reinhardt, *The Genius,* 292
167. Flinn, "William Dieterle," 26.
168. Flinn, "William Dieterle," 23.
169. J. E. Sewell, *Daily Telegram,* London, England, October 14, 1935.